

BEYOND PARADISE

C. R. MULLONG

PZ 3

.M917

Be

COPY 2



BEYOND PARADISE

C. R. MULLONG

BEYOND PARADISE

BY

C. R. MULLONG ✓



DORRANCE & COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

Copy 2

COPYRIGHT 1924
DORRANCE & COMPANY INC ✓

PZ 3
M 917
R 14
C 1511

21

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEC 19 24 ✓ R

©CLAS15248 ✓ no 2

BEYOND PARADISE

Chapter I

There was nothing unusual about the marriage of Marcia Stover and Doctor Donald Blake, except, perhaps, that it was preceded by a courtship of ten years' duration, prolonged by Marcia's coquetry.

During the early stages of their acquaintance, she did not even bother to treat Blake with common civility. But he met her rebuffs with a sort of disarming timidity, despite the fact that her attitude frequently reduced him to a point where he was willing to surrender to discouragement. But these fits of despondency were of short duration, and with their passing he would renew his determination to win her with patient, unremitting efforts to prove his devotion. As the years passed, the gangling, raw-boned young doctor, who had startled his Waverly colleagues by performing a remarkable surgical operation within a week after his graduation, grew up to all of Marcia's girlish ideals,—far beyond anything she had thought possible.

In the meantime, his conspicuous progress and unusual ability had attracted the attention of mothers of marriageable daughters, and Marcia was given plenty of reason to worry lest Blake's interest might be diverted from her. Long before he finally brought the matter to a climax by urging that it was time they married if they were ever going to be, she had spent many anxious days and restless nights because of his apparent willingness to let matters between them drag on indefinitely. She was not so inclined to forestall his wishes this time as she had been on the occasion when he had first asked her to be his wife the year after they had met. So, without any show of coquettish hesitancy, Marcia proposed that they motor directly to Webster, where her uncle would marry them.

So it happened that they were married a few hours later. The ceremony performed, Blake took the girl in his arms, holding her close for an instant and looking

deep into her blue eyes, as if endeavoring to realize the fact that she was at last his wife. Then he kissed her, whispering, "This is the greatest thing I ever did in my life."

"I'll never give you a reason to think otherwise," she assured him. "Oh, the world—this world—is wonderful to live in!"

And although they were quite unconscious of any triteness of expression, their words did not differ much from many, many others her uncle had heard uttered by as many lovers on the completion of the innumerable wedding ceremonies he had been called upon to perform during his long ministerial career.

The Stover's family automobile was waiting for the couple when they emerged from the parsonage, Marcia's father having driven up from Williston when she telephoned that they were going to Webster to be married by her Uncle Adam. A small boy, mowing the parsonage lawn, flung a handful of rice after them as they climbed into the car, for which pleasantry Blake tossed him a dollar. The lad looked wistfully after the machine fast disappearing down the dusty road, delighted by the grotesque floppings of a collection of old shoes he had suspended from one of the rear springs. "Gee," he muttered to himself, "that guy must be happy, throwin' me a buck just like nothin'."

During his ten years of courtship Blake had not allowed his love affair to interfere seriously with his work. In addition to an unremitting devotion to his profession, he had practiced the strictest economy, and had, as a consequence, accumulated an enviable amount of money and real estate. His marriage to Marcia, therefore, was regarded by many Waverly folk as the union of beauty and the treasure chest.

The presumption that Marcia was a spendthrift was justified, if people who spend all they earn to live decently may be fairly called that. In extenuation of the charge, it is only honest to admit that her case was a rather unusual one. She was one of those persons who are practically compelled to live exceptionally well. Her extraordinary beauty, which had brought her equally

extraordinary popularity, opened the doors of homes to her not frequented by people in plebian attire, and she was not the sort of person likely to disappoint or embarrass anyone. So, despite the fact that she spent her entire salary on becoming and more or less costly clothes, it would be unfair to condemn her as extravagant or wasteful.

Although always conspicuously attractive in appearance, Marcia spent considerably less money for clothes than most of her friends, many of whom appeared commonplace or even dowdy in comparison. Wise application of the limited funds at her disposal made it possible for her to maintain an air of prosperity bordering on opulence; her training in careful expenditure was the result of dire necessity. While she was still studying at a school for girls in St. Louis, her father grew more and more negligent in the payment of her allowance, until at last she was forced to leave school and extract the means of a livelihood from her own resources.

For a girl not yet seventeen, who had never known the necessity of working outside her own home, this was no easy matter. She was fortunate, however, in having taken a summer course after graduation from high school, thus obtaining a certificate to teach school. This naturally was the first solution of her problem that occurred to her when she was confronted with the necessity of becoming a wage earner. Through friendship, and a relationship somewhat more cordial than friendship, with Lyman Curtis, a man influential with the superintendent of schools in Waverly, she succeeded in being appointed to a vacancy caused by death. At first the school board was opposed to engaging her on the score of her youth, but it did not take long for her precocity to win their confidence, and they asked for a renewal of her contract even before its expiration.

It happened that Blake came to Waverly about a week before the end of the school term, and he became acquainted with Marcia among other boarders at the place where he took his meals. He fell promptly and deeply in love with her, but her unusual beauty and vivacity made him feel that it would be presumption for him to openly consider himself an eligible suitor. She somewhat

relieved the awkward feeling her presence inspired in him when she made interested inquiries regarding a surgical operation he had performed on the principal of the school where she taught.

From then on, he looked forward eagerly to the hours when he and his fellow-boarders gathered for meals; he could sit across the table from Marcia and revel in his admiration of her charms. Even though he was just starting out in the practice of medicine, and correspondingly anxious to increase his small but growing practice, he did not allow professional duties to interfere with meal-time. He was certain then to see Marcia, if at no other time. But one evening he missed her, and, finding a stranger in her place at the table, grew sick at heart. She had migrated for the summer. For several days he grieved, but eventually consoled himself with looking forward to her return.

When he learned that Marcia had gone to Williston to spend the summer with her father, the neighboring county-seat became to him a sort of shrine. Williston, looked upon with disdain by the populace of Waverly, seemed a wonderful town to him—it must be, to be the home of such a wonderful girl. On occasions when he accompanied patients to Omaha for consultation with specialists, he would detour through Williston, hoping that he might be fortunate enough to get a glimpse of her as he passed through; for he lacked the courage to call on her in the face of her apparent lack of interest in him.

Late that summer she returned again to Waverly, and Blake became once more a happy, hopeful man, hurrying to his meals, where she could not well avoid chatting with him. Occasionally, through his best efforts at scheming, he managed an apparently casual stroll with her to the schoolhouse, two blocks away. It was on one of these walks that he determined he would not permit her to return to Williston to spend another vacation except accompanied by him as her husband. The bare thought of not seeing her at all for months at a time was enough to drive him mad. And yet, despite his determination, this coming and going of Marcia was to continue for ten years, though her heart grew more and more constant,

just as her inclination to spend more money grew with her increased salary. Her constancy and his mellowing years served to cement Blake's determination to win her, until his persistency degenerated almost into a business matter.

Even so soon after her marriage, while the machine was speeding toward Williston, a change seemed to come over Marcia. No one would have suspected her of frivolity; she was the very model of a sedate wife. All her thoughts and solicitude were for their future mutual home. These considerations completely displaced her former somewhat self-centered habit of mind, and her enthusiasm re-acted upon Blake, though his ten years of waiting had converted him into one of those confirmed bachelors, who, when they marry, usually experience difficulty in lifting themselves out of their accustomed rut.

During the early stages of their acquaintance, and after she had unwisely allowed their courtship to drag on indefinitely, her dreams of future luxury were matched by his visions of power and freedom from home cares. Now that the die was definitely cast, he could talk about domestic and professional affairs with equal avidity. Together they discussed the home he had begun building only a fortnight before their marriage, and in their discussion they dwelt on rugs, rockers, tables, beds, dishes and a thousand and one other things that would furnish it. They pictured the size and the plan of their garden, in which they would labor together. Marcia told him she wanted a screened-in porch, with ferns and swings and comfortable chairs under electric fans, where Blake could lounge and rest and read after office hours. She would delight in sitting near him, engaged in some household task.

They encountered difficulty in deciding whether or not they would have a single or double garage. Blake did not need more than one car in his work, but Marcia had always wanted a motor car of her own, and the erection of a double garage was the first step in her plans to get it.

Then, too, there was some debate over whether it was advisable to have the nursery facing the north or east.

Blake was a practical man and spoke always without ambiguity. He consulted the blue-print plans of the house. "The bright morning sun has a deleterious effect on a baby's eyes," he told her with professional wisdom. "It wouldn't do to have the nursery face the east."

"I believe you're right, Don," she agreed, blushing, and pretended to interest herself in something which really held no interest for her. "I am so ignorant about those things," she added, "I'll leave them to your judgment."

"Well, the plans call for it on the north."

But later, when Blake was converted to a theory that babies should have an abundance of sunlight, the nursery was changed to a room on the east.

* * * * *

Blake and Marcia had agreed that their honeymoon should be brief—brief, that is, as far as their stay away from Waverly was concerned, but with their whole life together prolonged into a perpetual honeymoon. So, after spending a week hiking and motoring in the Black Hills, the two returned to Waverly. The people seemed more cordial than before; the songs of the birds sweeter; the hills and trees greener; the little town of ten thousand population appeared to them a gay and bustling metropolis. And their happiness centered about their little home, which was now in an advanced stage of construction,—a six-room bungalow that seemed to them more spacious than any other house in the town.

Blake excused himself as soon as he had Marcia comfortably located in a suite of rooms they had engaged at the *Dumont* hotel, where they would live until their home was completed. He pretended that there was some business at the office urgently awaiting his attention, but in reality he wanted to stroll down the street to receive the good wishes and congratulations of his friends. Realizing that he was just as likely to find himself swapping jokes with Bon Moran, the ash hauler, as he was to stop and talk with Thomas Folsom, the banker, he did not want the precious and dignified Marcia with him, to be embarrassed.

He was surprised to discover what a serious regard

his married friends had for the state. Instead of jovial slaps on the shoulder and shafts of witticism, he received from them expressions of hope for his success and happiness—as if they felt he needed their sympathy. Their seriousness was perplexing, but after a while he was able to figure the thing out for himself. It was because he had stepped from relative unimportance and irresponsibility to a position of prominence. The thought made him extremely proud.

He went back to the hotel. There he met a salesman whom he had patronized ever since establishing himself in Waverly. He shook hands with the man and talked to him with unusual expansiveness. The salesman, quick to sense the situation, scented a good day's business, and found his judgment was substantiated in an easy sale to the doctor of as many instruments as he had purchased in the whole previous ten years.

Before leaving the hotel, Blake had told Marcia the exact hour he expected to dine, and precisely on the minute she descended in the wheezing, droning old elevator. The salesman welcomed the interruption, thinking that possibly the doctor had gone suddenly mad, it was so unusual for him to buy what he was not immediately in need of. But Blake knew what he was doing. For a long time he had felt the need for replacing his old equipment, but market conditions had been such that it was impossible for him to get just what he wanted. Granting that his sense of economy bordered on the niggardly, the value of a dollar never influenced him when he was buying surgical supplies. To him the life of a patient was worth more than all the money in the world, and it was possibly this habit of mind regarding the safety of his patients, even at the expense of comforts for himself that might prolong his usefulness, that had made him such a phenomenal success in his profession.

* * * * *

For Marcia there was no short cut to happiness and contentment. These were only possible to her with body and mind profusely occupied, and during the days when the decorators were putting the finishing touches to her new home, and she was making daily pilgrimages to it, she

found much to do that no one else could have done for her satisfactorily. By nature she was facile; by application she had learned; by training she had acquired precision; and it was this very perfection and exactness that had proved more or less of a hindrance to her in the past. To note a lack of tactful aggressiveness in others was aggravating to her, and her impatience with the ineptness of the average laborer, made it easier for her to do a great many things herself than exhaust her energy in trying to teach others to do them.

"I'll be glad," she said to her husband one evening, gratified over the result of a day of hard work, "when we're settled and I can do all of my work myself."

"You'll have a maid, of course," Blake protested. He considered her willingness to work an indication that she might readily resign herself to a life of drudgery. He knew of many instances where hard work and frequent child-bearing was the cause of beautiful women looking the part of household drudges, and although he did not subscribe to a life of luxurious idleness for anyone, he was not willing that Marcia should become a domestic slave in her desire to please him.

"I don't want a maid," she demurred. "I didn't learn to keep house for nothing."

"The room off the kitchen is especially designed for a maid's room," he reminded her. "To what use are you going to put it if you don't keep a servant?"

"Oh," she laughed, "we'll find some use for it after a while."

He knew what she had in mind. "Maybe we'll have to build an addition, by then."

"Maybe."

"I planned the house with that in mind."

"But, of course," she went on, "there's no hurry about a family."

"No, you're right," he agreed.

* * * * *

Even with their marriage thus long an established fact, Blake found it difficult at times to free himself from the feeling akin almost to awe that Marcia still inspired in him. Despite the fact that he was considered quite a

dominating personality by his colleagues, attacking them relentlessly whenever they blundered, although his own mistakes were made to appear in the light of experimental contributions, he was as meek as a lamb in the presence of his wife. This state of affairs was a source of grave worry to him for some time, and he wondered whether he would ever conquer what he considered a weakness. Had other women inspired in him the same feeling of timidity, it would have been less perplexing; but as a whole, women had little or no place in his life. He had never considered them as a sex very seriously, except as mothers and home-makers. He did not believe that, after marriage, they should disturb the mental tranquillity of the men who were endeavoring to make a livelihood for them.

But Marcia, like a good wife, never let slip an opportunity to use her influence in building up her husband's prestige. He soon felt the effect of her efforts in his enlarged practice. People who had never engaged him before were now consulting him regularly, and Marcia was his constant inspiration in his increasing activity.

"Marcia, you are wonderful," he said, in speaking to her about it one day. "You have accomplished something I've been trying to do ever since I came here. Mrs. Thomas Folsom came to see me today about a minor ear trouble that might have cleared up without medical attention. I know she came to me on your account; she wants to get acquainted with you. She asked me to speak to you about going to the Country Club with them Thursday evening for a sort of picnic. I accepted the invitation for you; I thought you would like to go. You don't mind?"

Marcia frowned. "But I hardly know her."

"What's the difference! All the people you know were strangers to you at one time."

"I wouldn't mind going if I knew them better," she temporized.

"I've been on friendly terms with the family for years," Blake went on, "but they've always before called in Creedon; this is my chance to cut in on him. It would help you, too. Mrs. Folsom is mighty popular, and, be-

lieve me, she has the money. I think we should feel flattered that she so evidently wants to be friendly with us."

Marcia was loathe to be rushed into a friendship she might regret, but she smiled prettily while she took time to think, in the meantime studying Blake hard. Surely there could be no ulterior motive in the brain behind those bland eyes; but why should a perfectly strange woman, through the medium of her husband, invite her to the Country Club? It was very perplexing. She knew Mrs. Folsom to be a beautiful woman and the mother of three lovely children. A beautiful woman! Other thoughts came to her mind as she recalled having seen Mrs. Folsom drive past in her electric car the day Marcia and her husband had returned from their honeymoon, and she had smiled prettily on Blake then. Marcia hardly knew what to feel about this woman.

"Thursday," she murmured abstractedly.

"Yes," Blake replied. "I couldn't think of any engagement we had for that evening."

She thought for a moment. "I have none," she returned.

He did not like the way she said it, and his gaze followed her as she went into an adjoining room, pretending there was something that required her attention before they went down for supper.

"So I have accomplished what he could not accomplish," she thought, puzzled. She turned this over and over in her mind. He considered her wonderful on that account. Was it only because of that? This feeling of baffled uncertainty was so new to her that she wished she could run to someone for consolation. She had heard stories of designing women who consulted doctors regularly for ailments that did not actually require medical attention. But she caught herself up, realizing how foolishly jealous she was allowing herself to become in pursuing this line of thought.

"You should try and accommodate yourself to my plans," Blake advised her on her return, suddenly finding himself possessed of a courage he had heretofore lacked in her presence. "I'd gladly do that much for you."

"Why, of course, Don," she said sweetly, stepping out into the corridor. "I am really glad we're going out with the Folsoms."

He pulled her back into the room and kissed her. "You're a darling," he said.

She struggled with a sudden, powerful revulsion of feeling, and was unable to answer, receiving his caress and kiss with an air of apparent detachment. They entered the elevator and went down together.

Although there were other hotels in Waverly, all newer but none larger than the *Dumont*, the old hostelry still drew the bulk of the business, and the lobby was filled and the dining room crowded when they entered. A man, his face heavily overcast, was seated at a table in a remote corner; he raised his head suddenly as Marcia and Blake entered, as if he had sensed something in the air. It was Lyman Curtis. Passing his hands impatiently over his eyes as if to clear his vision, his lips curved in a sickly smile of recognition. He indicated by a gesture that there was room for them at his table, then drew himself together and clumsily arose, swaying on his feet as he waited for them to approach.

"Drinking!" said Marcia under her breath. "He's positively drunk."

This was humiliating. Still, it was a relief to her that Blake did not know she had believed Curtis when he promised, shortly before her marriage, never to drink intoxicating liquors again. Being aware that intoxicated men usually babble a lot of nonsense, she tried to avoid taking a seat at his table, but was forced to do so on finding all the other tables fully occupied.

"Was just hoping someone would come along I knew," Curtis greeted them. "This is sort of an off-in-a-corner place here; private little nook, as it were. I want to talk to you. Both of you. Have lots to say. S'pose you haven't heard that I'm going to leave you?"

"No," said Blake, "I had not."

"Well, I am. Going to live where there are more people."

"Is that so!"

"Yes, sir."

"Getting too exclusive for ordinary society?" Marcia suggested, her manner rather strained.

"Maybe so, Marcia—I mean, Mrs. Blake—Mrs. Blake! Sounds funny to call you that, doesn't it? Yes, I am going to live in Washington—Just came from there—The Williston land office has been ordered closed—Mighty glad it came about—If it hadn't, you'd probably have seen me buried there some day."

"Williston has a nice cemetery," Marcia facetiously reminded him.

Curtis continued, not to be interrupted.

"Came down to see a few of my friends before leaving next week; you know, when it comes to saying adieu to people you've known all your life, it isn't the easiest thing in the world. However, I suppose there are worse things than that." He turned directly to Marcia, claiming her undivided attention. "You know there are, don't you? Remember?"

"How will they ever get along without you in Williston?" she teased, ignoring his impertinence. "You are practically a necessity down there."

"Never really thought of that very seriously," he retorted, musingly. "They'll have to sort of flounder along until they accustom themselves to the changed conditions."

"That will be a difficult thing to do."

"You know, don't you?"

Marcia raised her brows. "Oh, yes."

"However great my loss to the town may be, it will not effect it as your departure did. You are the one who is missed; your leaving put the town under chloroform."

He was talking loud enough to be heard by the people at nearby tables, and Marcia was painfully embarrassed. She was convincing herself that he was not too thoroughly intoxicated to know what he was either doing or saying, and realized it was best not to torment him or he might embarrass her further. So she retorted lightly, "It's a considerable shock to a community losing two of its best people so near together."

"You're great on valuation," he retorted, patting her arm familiarly. "You're all right, girlie."

His actions were disconcerting in the extreme. Marcia

turned to look at Blake, but he had nothing to say. Those eyes that she had studied so intently when he had spoken to her about Mrs. Folsom were more troubled than she liked to see them.

As if aroused by her apprehensive gaze, Blake rallied himself to her support, saying, "I'm glad to hear that you are bettering yourself, Lyman. Your ability entitles you to something more profitable than anything you've had in Williston. Washington will afford you opportunities you could never hope for out here."

The other laughed boisterously; he was at that stage of pompous intoxication where he could regard Blake as insignificant. "In other words," he retorted, "you're glad to see me go."

His words and attitude were becoming extremely distasteful to the physician. "Don't make a fool of yourself!" he advised. "You've got everybody in the room listening to you. And your talk doesn't sound very well!"

Curtis turned to scan the guests. "I should worry," he said. "Nobody knows me." Then, leaning close to Marcia, he continued in a lowered tone. "Marriage doesn't always signify choice, does it?"

Marcia made no reply. It was useless to argue or reason with him.

"Silence speaks louder than words," he taunted, when she had nothing to say. "Well, it's too bad."

Blake felt a strong desire to get up and thrash the insolent fellow. He was powerful enough to do it without drawing an extra breath, but out of consideration for his wife, he was not inclined to create a scene, so he restrained himself, in silence. Marcia, more accustomed to Curtis' drunken maunderings, could find humor in what she considered his rather amusing behavior. Still, she was not anxious to see her husband suffer humiliation at the hand of her former admirer.

"I want you to stop talking that way!" she admonished. "I am happier now than I've ever been," she added from the depths of her heart. "You know, a good many people tremble when they say 'I do,' wondering if they love enough to truly say it. Well, I didn't tremble."

Curtis was eating lump sugar and drinking great quan-

tities of water, and the combination seemed to have a sobering effect on him. He tried to interpret Marcia's remarks as humorous, but nevertheless could not refrain from drawling a stinging retort. "Well, money does carry a lot of joy with it."

"Yes," agreed Marcia, pretending to consider the matter seriously, "it's a nice thing to have lying around."

Blake smiled complacently as he recalled how utterly chagrined Curtis had been by the failure of his courtship; still, the knowledge that he had not fully recovered from his disappointment was a trifle disconcerting, for a poor loser is liable to be troublesome. He studied Marcia a little guiltily, wondering if she was still the rather flighty girl he had known, still so unstable that he would be forced to warn this fellow to keep away from his wife.

The sugar and water had nearly sobered Curtis, and he was becoming rapidly less groggy and more in command of himself. As the two men were seated at the table, one on either side of her, Marcia compared them as she had never had an opportunity to do before. They were as unlike in both physical and mental traits as it was possible for two men to be. Blake was a large, rather awkward man, who seldom indulged in and had very little to say about matters frivolous. A tireless worker, he preferred his exacting rounds of calls and difficult hours in the operating room even to the sports he loved so well.

His deep blue eyes were bright with intelligence. His well-shaped head, set close to the shoulders of a large, almost cumbersome frame, was profusely covered with light, wavy hair, that seemed always ready for the barber. He was queer, terse, original; but that was the way Marcia liked him. If he had been other than that he might have failed to attract her so infinitely. She admired him for what he was, not for what he might become in the future, although she had visions of him attaining great things. He seldom smiled, much less laughed, and when he did, there was no doubt that he was delightfully entertained. It was because he had smiled a few moments ago that Marcia knew he had no aversion for Lyman Curtis other than the inevitable one a man

must feel for his wife's former sweetheart. That meant much to her.

Marcia turned her attention to Curtis. His skin was dark, and his eyes and hair so black that his origin was a matter of speculation. His build was lithe, and perfectly proportioned. He smiled almost constantly and his smile often deepened into noisy laughter, even when it was rather uncalled for. He was affable and courteous to the point of affectation, insisting that his little courtesies be accepted even when his persistency made those about him uncomfortable. His hands, one weighted with a superb two-carat diamond, seldom raised anything heavier in the performance of actual labor than a pen or pencil, though they were conspicuous in the frequent adjustment of his immaculate tie and collar.

He was the elegant fellow, responsible to no one except those to whom he owed political allegiance in return for the position he held. His method of dealing with people was marred by a sort of suave callousness, but so clever was he in this that the majority of those with whom he came in contact were profuse in their praises of his kindness and honesty.

The waiter brought their meal, and as the two men conversed while they were dining, Marcia listened to them intently. Blake was intent upon business, the future of Waverly, their new home and kindred subjects. Curtis talked about distant people, distant cities, distant countries. Marcia admired this; it seemed to indicate a depth of experience which she envied.

Just here the waiter approached Blake and informed him that he was wanted on the telephone. He excused himself with courteous formality, and his politeness pleased Marcia, for, when they were rivals for her, Curtis had often spoken of Blake as an uncouth "rough-neck." He certainly had never given her reason to make such a charge, but as she looked after his retreating figure, she wondered if anyone beside herself had ever noted his ill-fitting clothes and boorish swagger.

"I am wanted at the hospital at once," he announced on his return. "If you are not busy this evening, Lyman,

you might take Marcia to a picture show. I'll join you as soon as I can get away."

"That will be fine," returned Curtis. "I had planned on going—alone. They have announced an extraordinary 'feature' for tonight."

"You'll hurry, won't you, dear?" Marcia urged Blake. "I want you to see the show, too."

"I won't be gone long," he assured her. "That D. T. patient has gone on a rampage again."

It seemed to Marcia that he was in a great hurry about getting away. As her eyes followed him leaving the room, she wondered if a pretty nurse was perhaps caring for the violent patient.

On the way to the theatre Marcia kept looking for Blake, thinking he might be waiting for them somewhere along their route, knowing he had had plenty of time to minister to the delirious patient, upon whom he had paid emergency calls for a week. But once arrived and seated in the theatre, the picture held her undivided attention, and she soon forgot about the little hurt Blake's tardiness had caused her. She followed the plot in the picture closely, oblivious to everything but the scenes and actors on the screen. The show was ended before she thought of Blake again.

"What can have been keeping Don so long?" she speculated as they came out.

"You shouldn't be suspicious," admonished Curtis. "Doctors, you know, are likely to be detained any time. That's the nice part about being a doctor."

But it was not in defense of Blake that he had spoken; on the other hand, he was deliberately trying to shake her confidence in him. Although Curtis was now perfectly sober, he was still intent on causing trouble, if possible, between Blake and the girl he himself had hoped to marry.

Marcia stopped in a public booth to telephone. "He just left the hospital," she explained when she came back. "Let us walk in that direction and meet him."

"Let's walk slowly," urged Curtis, when she was inclined to hurry. "He'll be coming this way, anyway. The night is splendid, the moon perfect. I want to walk and talk as we used to . . . Those memories of

other days, Marcia!" He looked down at her and saw she was gazing blankly at the path in front of them. "Those were the happy days of doubt and hope," he continued. "They were just painful enough to make me wish for more. I hate to admit it, but I am a poor loser. To think that—"

"Oh, please go on," she begged him mockingly, determined to tantalize him. They were alone now, and anything he might say would not be misinterpreted. "You are so much more effective sentimental than when you try to be serious."

"You've kidded me out of every serious notion I ever had," he lamented, "and see where you left me—high and dry!"

What he told her struck home, and she resented the twinge of conscience it cost her. "Don't be silly, Lyman," she expostulated.

"I'm not silly!" he protested.

"You don't think you are, that's all."

"I know blamed well what's troubling me, and I also know what you think is troubling me. That's not it. I'll admit I've taken a few drinks, but my senses are perfectly clear. I know pretty well what I'm talking about when I tell you I'll never stop—"

"Drinking?" she mocked him.

"No!" he said, testily. "I wish you'd think of me as a man when I tell you I'll never get over loving you—"

She broke in angrily: "Have you ever honestly tried to do something you found difficult?"

"Well," he considered, "I don't think I ever found it necessary."

"Then create an obligation for yourself and meet it squarely. You'll never amount to anything if you go on as you are."

"You are partly to blame for what I am."

"It is unthinkable that I should be as influential as that," retorted Marcia, deeply sarcastic.

"That's all right," he said sullenly. "Go ahead and laugh at me all you want. You can't hurt me any more than you already have."

"Hurt you?"

"Yes . . . ! Everything bad I've ever done I can lay to you."

"Including your drunken condition when we met you at the hotel tonight, I suppose," suggested Marcia.

"Yes, by God!"

Marcia sniffed. "You remember, you promised me you'd give up drinking. I was dumbfounded when I saw the condition you were in this evening; had it not been that I didn't want Donald to know that I was ashamed of you I would have ignored you when you staggered toward us in the dining room."

"So you were ashamed of me?"

"Yes—I was—very much."

They walked on in silence, Marcia watching for Blake. When they reached the hospital, and she had seen nothing of him, she went in to inquire; the night-nurse told her he had left nearly half an hour before. Curtis seemed pleased when she came back without him.

"Missed him?" he asked.

Marcia nodded her head. "It seems we did."

They started back silently in the direction of the hotel, as if tired of baiting each other. The night air was heavy with the fragrance of flowers, and its stillness was disturbed only by the occasional hum of motors and the twitter of katydids.

"Marcia," said Lyman, breaking the long silence that had lasted until they were within sight of the hotel. "I am sorry—very sorry because I gave you reason to be disappointed in me. My promise was made with absolute sincerity, with no other thought than to fulfill it, but you changed everything."

"How did I change things?"

"Your marriage—it throttled every ambition in me. As long as I felt I had an even chance, my whole life, my very soul, was fired with the hope that some day we would work out our problems together; but when you chose between Blake and me, and I lost, there was no future left for me. Brooding over it made me reckless and I did some terrible things!"

"Terrible things! Surely nothing really terrible, Lyman!" Instinctively she grasped his arm; in the dimness of

the distant lights he observed her face close to his. He turned his head away, tortured by the thought that she belonged to someone else.

"Yes, terrible things. In fact, I cannot think of suitable words to describe what I have done."

Marcia was haunted by fearful visions of the deeds he might have committed, but her imagination failed her in conjuring up anything really frightful enough to warrant his emphasis. They walked on in silence.

When they reached the hotel, Blake was waiting for them. He was sorry that he had not been able to meet them at the theatre, he said, speaking in his customary word-saving manner. Then he went on to explain further, addressing Marcia in particular. "On my way over from the hospital I stopped at the drug store to write a prescription, and I saw the painter there. He tells me that the house will be ready for us to move in this week."

"Then we had better decline Mrs. Folsom's invitation for Thursday evening. We will be busy and tired. I am anxious to get away from here; living in a hotel isn't altogether pleasant."

"Well, there are worse things than that," he briefly dismissed the subject. "A day or two more of it is really immaterial."

Blake did not want to forego the projected party. He had plans that included more than the mere golfing and lunching at the Country Club,—so Marcia's thoughts ran.

"I don't blame you for wanting to get into your own home," interposed Curtis, siding with Marcia. "A custom-made existence is all right if you can't have any other."

Marcia had experienced a strong revulsion of feeling against Curtis because of what he had told her, and she was anxious to avoid further conversation with him. Ignoring him, she turned to her husband. "You told me sometime ago you were anxious to make the change. You remember, don't you?"

"Of course," he assured her. "It isn't through any preference of mine that we are staying here, but I don't think we should disappoint the Folsoms on account of it."

Marcia did not reply. She was studying Blake uneasily.

"Mrs. Folsom is my fairy aunt," Curtis volunteered.

"Fairy aunt?" echoed Marcia, surprised out of her dislike of him. "That's the first time I ever heard of anything like that."

"A fairy aunt is one of those helpful souls children dream about," he explained.

Blake looked at Curtis skeptically, and Marcia, interpreting her husband's expression to suit herself, became more firmly convinced that it was all to her advantage to become more intimately acquainted with the fairy aunt. All she said was, "You'd better buy that thermos jug at Moore's, Don. Mr. Folsom looks to me as if we ought to have something cold along to drink."

* * * * *

As is often the case when a new house is being prepared for occupancy, there was an unexpected delay in getting the place ready, which kept the Blakes at the hotel for another fortnight. There seemed to be no end to Marcia's energy during that time. She attended breakfasts, club meetings, luncheons and card parties almost daily, though a Folsom house-party, where she met the remainder of Waverly's elite, was the most important activity that claimed her attention. This function, which was at first limited to half a dozen people, was eventually expanded to include forty, and it was the last she attended before taking up her duties as housewife.

There were plenty of other things to claim her attention beside the discharge of her social duties. There were the final touches to be given the house,—dusting, arranging the furniture, laying rugs, unpacking dishes and glassware, hanging curtains and draperies, and looking after a thousand other things. For several days she supervised and lent a helping hand everywhere. Often her pretty nose was smudged with black where she had rubbed it with grimy-gloved hand; and frequently a wisp of tousled, glistening black hair, that had slipped beneath the elastic band of her dust-cap, strayed across her face. When her presence was not required to oversee the man and woman who were ostensibly doing the work, she found

time to accompany Blake on drives. In return, he stole time enough from his pressing medical and surgical practice to take her to dancing parties at night.

Eventually the day came when their house was ready for occupancy, and they had eaten their last noon-day meal as regular boarders at the *Dumont* hotel. Blake had to leave immediately for a distant town in response to a telephone call for consultation with a colleague. "Try and get back in time for supper," Marcia begged him. "The cleaners up at the house are working straight through so they'll finish early. I didn't want them around to bother me while I'm cooking."

Blake looked at her a bit dubiously.

"You seem to doubt that I can cook," she protested, noting his skepticism.

"Oh, no," he assured her. "I was just thinking what wonderful creatures women are."

"I'm going to concoct something delicious," she boasted gaily.

"What?"

"I won't tell. You hurry back and find out."

"Watch me."

She went out to the car with him, and he made a great pretense of hurrying to get away from her. His light-hearted manner pleased Marcia, indeed she was finding everything he said and did absolutely perfect.

"I really mean it," she reiterated. "Hurry back and you'll be surprised."

Blake had visions of a moving picture comedy he had recently seen, depicting the culinary difficulties of a bride. "I believe you will surprise me. Confidence like yours can accomplish a lot."

"You'll see," she insisted enigmatically, choosing to disregard what looked like a lack of faith in her abilities.

"At what time will you have supper ready?"

"At six o'clock."

"I'll try and be on time."

"Well, of course, I'll wait if you're not here by then."

"I'll be back at six," he promised, starting away.

Punctuality was a virtue that had contributed largely to Blake's success, as Marcia well knew, and when she

reached the house she urged the workers to greater efforts in her eagerness to get them out of the way early. She wanted to assure herself an abundance of time in which to put to the test some of the things she had learned in a domestic science course, a few of which she felt confident she still remembered.

It was nearly three o'clock when the helpers left; they had scarcely reached the street before Marcia was eagerly scanning the pages of a ponderous cook-book, the contents of which seemed to have undergone some mysterious transformation, for they were all totally unfamiliar to her now. Then she got out some recipes her mother had written and by which she had cooked when she was a child. It occurred to her that she had never prepared a full meal at home, her share never having been more than the baking of a cake or the concocting of a single dish, when she helped her mother, and she suddenly realized the vast difference between one and several boiling pots. A horrible sensation of inadequacy surged through her as she realized her helplessness. Here she was in the vortices of a responsibility she had refused to regard seriously, only to find that it was utterly impossible for her to comprehend the simple formulas by which her mother had worked.

Her back was, metaphorically, to the wall. She remembered that her mother had several times told her that the best cooking is not done with the aid of a cook-book, so she set aside the volume, selected a variety of utensils from the pantry, and proceeded to put into execution what she had learned and forgotten years ago. She timed herself by the clock, finding she was progressing so rapidly that it would be necessary for her to check her progress or she would be more than an hour in advance of the schedule she had planned. So it was with pleasure that she saw Mrs. Donhagen, her widowed neighbor across the street, who had come over every day for several weeks, attracted by Marcia's bewildering activity, come ambling up the steps to make her daily visit. Marcia met her at the door, having learned enough about the peculiar old lady to know that she would not knock or ring the bell to announce her presence.

"I saw the help leaving," said Mrs. Donhagen as she waddled in, "and I says to myself, says I, 'they must be all moved in'." She raised her head to sniff the air. "Uh, cooking something good, too, ain't you?" she added.

"Yes, I made some pies and things."

"I thought as much," replied the woman, but looked dubiously at Marcia's beautifully-kept hands. "Sure, you don't intend to do all your own housework?"

"Of course I do! I'm a good cook, and I love doing it. Just made some of the grandest cookies! I'll give you some to take home. I want you to sample them and tell me what you think of them."

The old lady followed Marcia into the kitchen. "This is the nicest room in the whole house," she remarked as she entered.

Marcia smiled incredulously. "Do you think so?"

"Yes, it has the most in it." She took the cookies Marcia proffered her and began nibbling one. "Uhm-m, child, these are good."

"I think so myself. Come, I want you to see my dining room."

Mrs. Donhagen inspected the dining room critically. "A rich man like Doctor Blake could have his house crammed full of the nicest things money can buy," she said as they returned to the living room, visibly disappointed with the grade and amount of the furniture. She regretted her remark when she saw that it disturbed Marcia. Then, settling her pursy self in a rocker, she watched Marcia place her allotment of cookies on a table. "I mustn't forget those," she mused. "They're the best I've tasted for I don't know how long."

Mrs. Donhagen's kindly-meant criticism had made Marcia feel decidedly uncomfortable. It worried her because she had several times heard it casually hinted that Blake was inclined to penuriousness.

"I s'pose I'd better be going soon," said Mrs. Donhagen uneasily, "bein' you are busy getting supper."

Disregarding the woman's attempt at conciliation, Marcia crossed the room and turned to make a survey. "So you think I haven't enough in my house?"

"Mercy, yes! Plenty—there's plenty," Mrs. Donhagen

hastened to assure her. "I was just thinking what a fine table that is." She straightened up suddenly. "What have you in that there room?" With her thumb she indicated the room designated in the plans as the maid's room. "You didn't have it fixed up the last time I was here."

"There's nothing in it yet. We haven't any use for it just now. I think I'll convert it into a children's playroom after a while."

"That'll be nice. Doctor Blake likes children so; they're always hanging around him. . . . But they are a nuisance!"

"What's a nuisance?"

"Children!"

"Do you, a mother, really mean that?"

"I sure do! You'll find out—sometime." And she shook her head dismally. "Yes, they're sure a trouble and nuisance."

Marcia wondered. She wanted the old lady to continue, but the sound of a motor outside interrupted them. She went to the window to find Blake driving with great caution up the two narrow strips of concrete that led into the garage; it was the first time he had attempted it, and his facial expression was a study in concentration.

"I'll be going," repeated Mrs. Donhagen, edging toward the door. "See you again soon."

When Mrs. Donhagen had gone, Marcia opened the window. Blake had climbed out of the automobile and was walking toward the street inspecting the driveway. When he heard the window open he turned around.

"It requires steady driving, doesn't it?" Marcia offered.

"The curves are too sharp," he complained. "The contractor didn't build it the way I told him to."

"It will be bad on dark nights," she suggested. "You'll have to be careful."

"Well," he considered, "darkness isn't going to be so troublesome. The lights will take care of that. But I don't know how I'll make it when it's icy and slippery. At any rate, I can't take it on the run without risking my neck."

"Then don't try to take it on the run," she warned him. "I am too young to be a widow."

He liked her method of calling his attention to his ill-natured complaint, and he desisted from further grumbling, though mentally resolved that the driveway should receive prompt attention. He walked past the window and up the driveway steps to the porch. Marcia hurried out to meet him with the evening paper, holding up her face to be kissed.

"It isn't quite six o'clock," she reminded him, "so you sit down and read the paper while I put the things on the table."

"I'll help," he said, anxious to see how everything looked in its final arrangement. "May I?"

"Surely, if you want to."

They went in. Forgetting at once that he had intended to help Marcia, Blake walked solemnly from room to room realizing for the first time that he was in his own home. Marcia, busy in the kitchen and dining room, stopped now and then to enjoy his pleasure with him. He had been badly overworked lately, too busy to make suggestions that would mirror his tastes, and as he looked about, he saw Marcia reflected everywhere. Going slowly from one room to another, he occasionally felt a qualm that he had not provided the means for buying better furnishings, but on the whole he was happier than he had thought it was possible for a man to be. Everything was superlatively perfect. In their bedroom, over the head of the bed, hung a picture of a mother holding her babe, and on the mat beneath the picture were the words: "My darling."

"Lovely," he explained under his breath.

He was still admiring the picture when Marcia entered and taking him by the arm, led him to the table. His shrewd eyes took in at a glance the perfection of the meal she had prepared. He knew now that he had not misjudged her; she was the most wonderful woman in the world.

"Marcia," he said, taking her in his arms, "this is paradise!" He continued to hold her close to him for many thrilling seconds, during which their passionate love

flamed hotly. She felt most completely herself in his powerful arms, that closed about her like a vise, and when he had smothered her with kisses and was ready to release her, she sighed for more. He understood now what she meant when she had rather ambiguously expressed her desire to be without a maid: she wanted to be undisturbed when they loved like this.

Chapter II

Although separated by more than fifty miles of fertile farming country, there existed a spirit of friendly rivalry between Williston and Waverly; it was this spur of competition that tended to give both places a somewhat metropolitan air, in spite of their relative smallness and unimportance. Both towns boasted several thriving factories and prosperous business houses, and as a consequence, a few wealthy residents. The municipal improvements were not of the best, but they were sufficiently up-to-date to attract the attention of the officials of surrounding towns, who had twice, within the past five years, sent representatives to find out how Williston and Waverly succeeded in keeping taxes at a minimum. And once a year the four leading department stores sent their buyers east to make purchases and study the metropolitan markets.

Waverly was much the older of the two places, having been a town of considerable size when the first railroad reached it; but in recent years Williston had grown until now it out-populated its rival by nearly a thousand. Williston enjoyed the advantage of being situated on a main-line railroad, the junction of several important branches; while Waverly was the common terminus of three rail lines radiating in six directions, the roads having utilized it as a means of conveniently reaching other points rather than because its own traffic was particularly valuable.

Even though the entire population of the two towns numbered only a little over twenty thousand, each had an exclusive hill-district bearing a piquant agnomen to denote that it was the residence of the idle-rich. Marcia had not lived in this select district in Williston nor was she living in it in Waverly, but since she had been much sought after by Williston society during her vacations, and had recently been elected to an important official posi-

tion in the club, some of the Waverly folks felt that perhaps they had gained a point when she relinquished her hold on Williston and became one of their set.

But the group that she had come in contact with since her marriage had not regarded her seriously enough to study her closely, thinking of her merely as a school teacher who was not sufficiently important to bother over. She had not made a very favorable impression among her new associates, and they were inclined to judge the rest of Williston by her complacent conduct. If they were right then, Waverly was after all really the more attractive of the two towns. As yet, Waverly had been unable to fathom her. She was under discussion when the Blakes and the Folsoms arrived together, for the second time within the week, at the Country Club.

"What do you think of that Mrs. Blake?" asked one of a quartet of women drinking tea on the club house veranda.

"She's a puzzle to me," admitted one of them.

"Not to me," declared another. "Birds of a feather—" She broke off and looked meaningfully at Mrs. Folsom. "You know," she added.

"Her family is one of the very nicest in Williston. I was a neighbor to them for nine years." The fourth woman rose to Marcia's defense.

The group devoted themselves to their teacups until the arrivals finally decided upon the shade of the huge sycamore tree on the lawn as a place for supper, leaving the coast clear for uninterrupted gossip.

"It's too bad we can't all marry money," chirped the woman who had said Marcia puzzled her, "now, isn't it, girls?" And because at least two of the women had made money their matrimonial object, the unfortunate remark broke up the tea-party. My! My!! One of them had to hurry home now. She had enjoyed herself so much that she had failed to notice how the time was flying. Another had to meet her husband at the store. She always went to the store to ride home with him on Friday evenings.

* * * * *

"Doctor Blake and I'll play a round of golf," the ponderous Folsom informed his wife as he proceeded

toward a table with two baskets, limping more than usual, for he was unable to use his cane to steady himself because of the huge baskets he was carrying. He placed them on a bench, puffing. "We'll play around once. . . . You might unpack this stuff and get it ready to eat when you see us coming up on number eight." He indicated the eighth green with his thumb. He looked at his wife to see if she was listening to his instructions, and when he thought she was not, he reiterated brusquely: "That's the eighth green over there."

Mrs. Folsom, busily packing something away in the shade, said carelessly, "I'll watch for you."

"You'd better be watching those youngsters, too. They're liable to get hurt around those swings and contraptions."

The children had scurried off to the teeter board, the girls seesawing the plank with all their might, while the boy stood balancing himself on it precariously. Mrs. Folsom threw them a brief word of caution, just to accede agreeably to her husband's wishes. But her warning seemed but to increase their activity, for they teetered with all the more violence.

"If they were mine," Marcia made a fervent mental resolution, "I'd make them mind."

The men secured their golf kits and proceeded to tee up, their wives watching them admiringly as they went through a series of swings and poses. Finally, they drove off—a little nervous because the women were watching them. Both were consistently long drivers, but extremely erratic about placing their shots. The ball would sail with lightning speed from one side of the course to the other, twisting and slicing until it finally sought a resting place in the tall grass off the fairway on the opposite side from which it had started.

The thought of employing a caddy never entered either of their minds, and since they drove into the rough from nearly every tee, they wasted a great deal of time looking for lost balls. Blake persisted in hunting until his ball was recovered, but Folsom was not inclined to waste much time in this manner. His lameness made it difficult for him to kick around in the thick grass.

"Charge it to profit and loss," he would advise Blake. "Use another ball."

"It's right in here," Blake would insist, giving up the search reluctantly, "right here where I've got it marked."

Even though Blake was a careful retriever, they had lost four balls apiece when they reached the sixth tee, and could continue to play only by using balls they had found while looking for their own.

They had both been playing rather carelessly, too engrossed in discussing a government scandal the papers were airing to take their game seriously. Folsom changed the subject to affairs nearer home, and Blake encouraged him by listening with keen interest, intent on proving himself a congenial companion to the banker.

"Would you care to come in with me on a good money-making proposition?" Folsom asked, as they turned at the seventh hole. "I've been wanting to talk to you about it for some time."

Blake tried to sound indifferent as he inquired, "What is the nature of the proposition?"

Folsom shook himself into a firmer stance and sent his ball sailing with a mighty swing. "I'm thinking of buying train-load lots of sheep this fall and feeding them up," he explained, turning to Blake when he had "spotted" his ball. "Last year I cleared up nearly thirty thousand dollars that way. This year I want to go into it on a larger scale, but I'm not exactly in a financial position to put the thing over alone. I know you've got some money lying idle. By purchasing the sheep in larger numbers we can get them at a comfortable reduction, without requiring any extra help to take care of them. You can figure for yourself how that will swell the profits."

The thought of going into such an ambitious undertaking momentarily staggered Blake; he could see great possibilities in a venture of that kind—loss as well as gain, either of which was enough to make him uneasy. He was between two fires: the fear of a loss that might bankrupt him, and the intensely alluring chance of making a fortune.

"I don't think I want to go into a business I don't know anything about," he said, declining, and then practically

accepting in the same breath. "It will be an entirely new undertaking for me."

"I haven't spent years of figuring it out to make it a losing enterprise," Folsom asserted.

"Anything like that has always seemed a little risky to me."

The banker resorted to high-pressure methods. "Unless you're willing to take a little risk you can't expect to get very far in the big game. There's a man in this town, a shrewd business man, too, who is waiting for me to ask him to come in on this. He's mighty careful about the kind of deals he goes into, and if it looked at all risky to him, he'd steer shy. It's a cinch, I tell you. The feed is handy and cheap—beet-pulp from the sugar factory. They're glad to get rid of it. I've practically got a monopoly on it, at a little above nothing, so there's no danger of competition as long as I can use all the pulp. This business is going to be profitable as long as too many others don't get into it, but since the beet average is being increased each year there'll have to be more sheep fed. I'd rather have a friend like you come in with me than have outsiders start in on their own hook."

But Blake persisted in his caution. "This is too new for me to decide quickly."

"Well, take your time and think it over."

"If I take up a sideline," Blake went on to explain, "I'd rather take hold of something that is more closely allied with my profession."

"We'll have nothing directly to do with the feeding and handling," Folsom argued. "Mark O'Day will do that. . . . He's the other man I'm figuring on having associated with us."

Blake thought a few moments before he spoke again. Then he said, in the words of a long-experienced married man, "I'll have to speak to Marcia about it."

* * * * *

The supper baskets were unpacked and their contents temptingly arranged on a table when the two men came in. Marcia was bringing a pitcher of water from the spring, her dark hair reflecting gleams of red in the shimmering sunlight.

"That cold water looks good to me," said Folsom, picking up a glass and holding it out to her. "Pour me a little."

Marcia filled the glass and Folsom gulped down the contents.

"My," she exclaimed, "you look so *warm!*"

"Yes, and you can bet I am, too," puffed the fat man, slushing the perspiration from his forehead. "Gimme another glass."

Mrs. Folsom was struggling desperately to keep her hungry progeny from taking complete charge of the table. "Tom," she called, "come over here and make these youngsters behave."

"I'd like to manage them for a day," said Marcia under her breath.

Folsom limped toward the table. "Be good children, now," he said, patting the boy on the head, "or Mamma will spank."

The deportment of the children and the way their parents handled them amused Blake. "A great bunch of youngsters," he said to himself. "But they need discipline."

"Did you have a good game?" asked Mrs. Folsom as she distributed cake to her offspring with quieting effect.

Folsom shook his head in disgust. "Rotten as usual," he said. "Lost about ten dollars' worth of balls, didn't we, Blake?"

"I haven't figured it up yet," replied the doctor.

"Thomas, you'll strain our credit to the breaking point some day," Mrs. Folsom turned the shaft of her wit against her husband's well-known tight-fistedness. "You are *such* a darling old spender!"

Folsom was just hot and tired enough to resent her facetiousness, and human enough to be entirely unconscious of his own inclination to niggardliness, honestly believing himself one of the most liberal men in town. The charity workers knew that he never declined to buy a ticket to their benefits, and he made annual donations to the commercial club, the baseball fund, the Y. M. C. A. Because he knew that Blake was inclined to stinginess he had studied him for a long time before asking him to

become his partner, and it was only because of Blake's financial standing that he had finally made him the offer. So he replied to his wife rather surily, "I'll quit playing the game if you think it's too expensive."

"Oh, don't say that."

"I will!" he insisted.

Mrs. Folsom laughed. "Next winter, of course."

He smiled, for he knew better than anyone the folly of his threat; he would rather lose his right arm than stop playing golf. It was a game he thoroughly enjoyed, although he played it very poorly, often losing no small sum of money when it so happened that he fell in with the proper company; he was continually declaring that he would square matters as soon as he got back in form. But he never did.

In a desire to make himself helpful, he limped up to the table carrying two chairs. There he stopped to watch Marcia while she restored order among the children. They had eaten what their mother had given them and were again getting restive. Marcia was employing something new to him in the way of strategy; he did not understand her methods any more than the children did, though they seemed to have a mysteriously quieting effect.

"The trick is in knowing how," he complimented her. "And I guess you know how."

"Probably I could play golf, too," she suggested, smiling. "I mean, as badly as you do."

"I don't turn in such a terrible score as you might think," he said, defending himself. He relieved his wife of the chairs she was bringing up. "When I hit the pellet more than fifty times I say my game is rotten," he continued to explain. "Lots of the fellows come out here and play above sixty and think they're doing mighty well."

"I'd like to watch you play. . . Possibly I could learn the game."

The banker's rotund face brightened. "Sure you could," he assured her. "I'm the best little teacher you ever saw."

"It looks easy," offered Mrs. Folsom, and Blake suggested that the women make a try after supper.

"That's a fine idea," agreed Folsom. "Let's hurry with the feed."

When they were ready to start, there was less than half an hour left for play, so they went to number three and began playing on what were known as the inside holes, numbers three and four and back on number two. Because it was getting late, the men decided not to play but caddy for the ladies.

Mrs. Folsom played all of her strokes with the same club, too stubborn to allow anyone to correct her faults.

"Go mind your own business with those sticks," she told her husband when he attempted to explain the uses of a mashie to her. "This one is all I need."

Folsom gave her up as hopeless, and assisted Blake in teaching Marcia the intricacies of the sport. Marcia, anxious to learn all she could, was careful to observe everything she was told regarding stance, carrying through, keeping her eye on the ball, and much other silly-sounding advice. As often happens, she played a very creditable game for a beginner, thereby more completely winning Folsom's admiration and respect.

"It isn't nearly as difficult or fatiguing as tennis," she gave her verdict when she returned to the club house. "I like it."

"We'll have to come out often," Folsom urged, as he turned the kits over to the caretaker. "You've got the earmarks that tell me you can go out and pull down prizes before very long." He regarded her shapely arms with something more than impersonal interest, and it was with apparent difficulty that he restrained himself from touching them. "You're the perfect golfing type. You have the muscle to develop a long drive."

Marcia showed her pleasure with a smile.

* * * * *

On the way home Folsom had spoken casually to Marcia of his offer to take Blake into business with him. She was pondering over it while she put the remnants of their picnic supper in the refrigerator, and later when she joined Blake on the front porch. He had assumed his usual recumbent position in the porch-swing; dusk was coming on and he was reading the evening paper

with difficulty in the waning light, apparently undisturbed by the activities of an electric fan going full tilt behind him.

"Doesn't that fan bother you, Don?" she asked.

"I don't mind it," Blake told her, holding the paper firmly to keep it from flopping. "This is the coolest place I've found today."

She turned on a floor lamp at his elbow. "I'll fix a cool drink for you," she offered. "I saved some chips of ice that wouldn't go into the refrigerator."

"That would be fine. . . . You might switch on the other light before you go in."

Marcia accommodately turned on the ceiling light, looking back for the "thank you" he had never omitted before their marriage, and went on in when he seemed oblivious to everything but the paper he was reading. At first these trifling inattentions annoyed her, but she was rapidly adjusting her likes and dislikes to conform with the matter-of-fact ways of married life.

When she reappeared on the porch she was carrying a salver with a silver pitcher, three glasses, and a plate of cookies. Placing the tray on a wicker settee near the swing and filling the glasses, she asked expectantly, "How's that?"

"That clicking sounds good," he told her. "But I can get along without the cookies."

"Then I'll take them over to poor Mrs. Donhagen. . . . I'm going to give her a glass of lemonade, too."

Blake looked across the street where the bent old woman was digging in her garden, her figure barely discernible in the gloaming. "Yes, *poor* Mrs. Donhagen."

"Isn't she poor?"

"She's rich."

"She dresses terribly—and the hovel she lives in! I thought she was living in poverty."

He took one of the glasses of lemonade Marcia had poured. "My dear, that woman owns more property than any other person in town. Nobody knows how rich she is. Hard work and saving did it. You can see for yourself,—seventy years old and breaking her back fussing in that garden."

"I don't care how rich she is, she's a poor old creature just the same." She picked up the plate. Then she hesitated. "You don't mind if I take this to her?"

"Certainly not. . . . Glad to have you do it."

He went to the door and opened it for her. She beamed her approval of his attentions, observing to herself: "He is the most considerate person on earth when his professional cares are not worrying him."

His gaze followed her as she hurried down the concrete walk. As she proceeded along Mr. Donhagen's beaten path while crossing the street, her left foot, due to a peculiar little inward twist she gave it when raising it from the ground, kicked up little puffs of dust. He smiled as he remembered that she had mildly resented his allusion to this peculiarity when they were at Lake Lashaway the previous summer. "You wonderful woman," he breathed to himself.

Then he resumed his position in the swing—reading. As minute after minute slipped away, the darkness deepening, he occasionally peered at the two women over his shoulder, who were standing under a street lamp in front of Mrs. Donhagen's house. He wondered what in the world they could be talking about so long. He did not like the old woman, but he was trying to hide his dislike from Marcia. Paradoxically, he looked upon her with disfavor because of her miserliness.

A little later Marcia came hurrying up the steps, saying as she flung open the porch door, "Did I stay away too long?"

He was slow in answering. "Well, no."

She crossed over to him, beating a gentle tattoo on his cheek. "You're not angry?"

"Oh, no. . . . Of course not." But he was—rather. Marcia was aware of it, but she knew he would soon get over it.

"Mrs. Donhagen is really quite interesting," she continued gaily, "the dear old soul."

"Did it please her to have you come over and feed her?"

Her caressing hand was suddenly withdrawn from his face. "I didn't feed her!"

He hastened to make amends: "I didn't mean to offend you," he said. "I think it's because I get lonely when you leave me that makes me feel ugly. I wouldn't intentionally hurt your feelings for anything in the world, only I wondered if she appreciated your act of kindness."

"I wasn't looking for any display of affection from her," Marcia replied a little testily, "so I didn't notice any."

"I understand she is touchy about accepting gifts; that is, she gives that impression. She wants people to know that she is well able to supply her own needs. Still, I've never known her to refuse favors."

"Well, she seemed to be grateful for being remembered."

"She's a queer old lady," he mused. "I haven't been able to figure her out. I want to understand people pretty well before getting too friendly with them."

Marcia thought of the Folsoms. How well was he acquainted with them? If he did not know Folsom any better than he led her to believe he did, it was absurd to consider going into partnership with him. But it would be unwise to speak of it at this time, with Blake in a rather uncertain mood and her own temper on edge. This partnership business was too serious a matter to discuss in a fit of anger.

She put it out of her mind and said instead, "Mrs. Donhagen seems terribly worried about her son Henry."

Blake chuckled. "Two years ago Henry stole seventy dollars of the money he was banking for his mother and got married with it," he explained. "He was thirty-three at the time, and didn't have a dime to his name—well, maybe he had a few dollars he had saved out of the two-dollar weekly allowance his mother had given him ever since she took him out of grammar school."

Marcia could see nothing amusing in such a situation; she had heard something of her neighbor's deficient son, and the whole affair seemed terribly tragic to her.

"Anything like that is too sad to make sport of, Don," she reproved him. "Misfortunes may come to any of us at any time."

Blake stretched and yawned and got up.

"I am going to bed," he said, disregarding Marcia's remarks. "I'll have to get out early in the morning."

But once in the house he forgot to go to bed. Either he was perturbed or deep in thought. For an hour he lolled silent in a chair, alternately staring into space and covering sheets of blank paper with figures. All Marcia's efforts to distract him were futile. At last, guessing at the cause of his pre-occupation, she asked, "What kind of an offer was it Mr. Folsom made you? He spoke to me about it this evening when we were driving home. But he didn't make himself very clear."

"I was just going to talk to you about it," replied Blake, rousing himself, "but I scarcely know where to begin; it's out of my line. For the life of me, I can't see where I'll find time to fool around with sheep."

"Sheep?"

"Yes, didn't he tell you about that?"

"No," said Marcia, curiously excited. "He just said he made you a partnership offer."

"Well, that's it. Feeding sheep."

"I understand he's in that in a big way."

"If I go in with him, we'll handle them by the trainloads."

Marcia was taken aback by the size of the proposition.

"So many?"

"Well, of course," returned Blake, "if I go in I want to make it worth while, or stay out of it altogether."

"But think of what would happen if you lost!"

"Yes, that's something to think about, all right," he agreed. "However, if we wait until a sure-fire proposition comes along we might wait a long time. I think I'll take a shot at this."

"Your judgment in matters of that kind is better than mine," Marcia conceded generously, though the whole scheme made very little appeal to her.

Long after they had retired Marcia continued to turn over Blake's contemplated venture in his mind. Why were people constantly weighting themselves down with cares they could easily avoid? Why was that? What was driving Blake to engage in this rather undesirable and uncertain business? He was financially situated so

that he could live the remainder of his life without doing another stroke of work. And yet here he was risking all he had made. But had she known that destiny had taken a hand and was using this means of shaping her own future for her, many things that were puzzling her would have seemed perfectly clear.

* * * * *

At the breakfast table the following morning Marcia brought up the subject again. "Would you mind telling me more about Mr. Folsom?—since you are to become associated with him in business."

He wondered what her own honest opinion was of such a connection. Confound it! Had she been worrying about that all night? She observed with some apprehension that he was uneasy.

"Why, no, Marcia," he answered casually. "I'll be glad to tell you all I know about him. Just what is it you want to know?"

"What else does he do besides banking and dealing in sheep?"

"Politics."

"Politics," she echoed musingly. "Politics."

"And besides that," Blake continued, "his office in the American National Bank is the pivotal point for almost every important transaction that takes place in the Third. Everyone fears him and he is given a free hand; this is not only true in—"

"What do you mean when you speak of the Third?" Marcia interrupted him.

Blake was provoked by what he considered her stupidity, but he set about enlightening her. He ended his explanation with the advice, "I'd suggest that you post yourself on some of these things."

"I knew about the Third district," she insisted, "only I am not up on your abbreviations."

"Well, then, coming back," Blake continued, "it is safe to say that Folsom was instrumental in the election of every public official in this county. He is what is commonly known as a political boss."

"What public office does he hold?" she asked, conceal-

ing her surprise at discovering that such a man was their intimate friend.

"None. Political bosses seldom do. To be incumbents themselves would put them on a par with those they rule."

From this he launched into a complicated discussion of "machine politics." Marcia was amazed at his store of knowledge. It had never dawned upon her that anything outside of medicine and surgery ever entered his mind. His reticence before their marriage had obscured his really remarkable versatility, which he was now constantly revealing. She had studied political science at school, listening to drawling professors who lectured in a languid and incomprehensible way. Their explanations were purely mechanical and had given her a real distaste for the subject. The information her husband had given her was not only highly instructive, but interesting as well.

"Of course," she reassured herself, "your connection with Mr. Folsom will only be in a business way."

"That's all. He has a good business head and that is why he's successful in politics. It's his business ability that attracts me. . . I abhor politicians who are successful in the political field alone, but I can admire a man who is adept in politics because he possesses unusual business acumen."

"How do you feel about woman's suffrage?" she asked guardedly.

He gave her a grave, questioning look. How deep was her concern in this? He answered her, "Women are too fine to engage in mud-slinging."

Everything he said was either a mystery or a revelation to her, and therefore fascinating.

"Mud-slinging," she repeated. "Is that your only objection?"

"It's the principal one."

The toast Marcia was making in the electric grille was sending up clouds of smoke. She succeeded in salvaging one piece, scraping off the part that was burned black. While Blake prepared his soft-boiled eggs, he watched her. "If that is what talking politics does," he said to

himself, "what is going to happen when women really get involved in them?"

"I was thinking," said Marcia, looking up, "how wonderful it is that some women have the courage to attempt to clean politics of some of its abuses."

"What good does it do?" he blustered. "You can't make me believe that any good is derived from a group of people going out and butting their heads against a stone wall!"

"Isn't there another way of looking at it?" she inquired helplessly.

"Possibly there is." He glanced at the clock on the buffet and then at his watch. "Well, I'm due at the hospital."

* * * * *

About twelve o'clock Blake came into the house, laughing. "The postman gave me this," he said, offering her a bundle no larger than a shaving stick. He pointed to the label: "'Plants—Do not crush.' It looks like nursery stock."

"My roses!" she said. "I've been looking for them."

"You mean to tell me that package contains live plants?"

"It's supposed to."

Blake laughed scornfully, disconcerting Marcia not at all. The plants were not costing her anything, and if there was any joke, it was not on her. She had advanced her subscription to a magazine two years and had received a half dozen rose plants as a premium.

She took the package and unwrapped it warily, removing several layers of paper, a stratum of moss, tin foil, and more paper before she came upon the puny tips of the plants and a leaflet protruding from one end of the bundle. She hoped Blake was unaware of her disappointment. She scanned them closely, deciding at last that they were really plants and had roots.

"They may amount to something in time," she said with forced cheerfulness. "See, they have roots."

"What kind of roses are they?" Blake wanted to know. Then, examining the labels, he read: "'Senator Nelson'—'Constitution'—'Dolly Vardon'—'Blue Devil'—'General Scott'." The last one to emerge from the waxed paper

he inspected closely. "This one has no tag," he announced.

"That must be the 'Wilbur Wright'—I was to get one by that name. Yes, you can see it's a climber. Do be careful, Don! You handle them so carelessly."

"Do you think they're worth the trouble of planting?"

"Surely! I'm going to put the climber under our bedroom window. It'll be nice to have roses to look at the first thing in the morning."

"In the morning?" he laughed. "What morning?"

"Wait and see."

"Just the same, it seems to me you're devoting a lot of time and trouble to something useless."

Suddenly she wanted to scream, and point out some of his faults as rudely as he did hers. She controlled herself with difficulty. Even if he was not inclined to trouble himself about the appearance of his office and person, she could see no reason why she should permit herself to fall into a similar habit of carelessness. But because Blake had always succeeded without difficulty in creating a favorable impression in spite of his laxity, he could not understand why Marcia should ruin her pretty hands trying to improve on nature. Two days of toiling with the spade and rake had so completely drained his initial enthusiasm for landscape gardening that he had no desire left to ever pother in the dirt again.

"Flowers and vines and shrubs of any kind are pretty," Marcia insisted. "But we can't expect them to amount to anything unless we give them care."

"I like them myself, but the jumbled arrangement of nature suits me. What is prettier than wild cucumbers climbing over a plum thicket?"

"More cucumbers and plum thickets," she came back. And she went about the preparation of dinner uncertain as to just whom the spoils of victory belonged.

* * * * *

That evening, a little later than usual because he had made a long drive in the country during the afternoon, Blake trundled into the garage with his ancient automobile. Marcia went out to meet him. Putting his arm

around her shoulders he asked good-naturedly, "Got supper about ready?"

"Yes, it's been ready a long while."

"I can smell it."

She knew that he couldn't, but perhaps it was the psychic effect of an enormous appetite that made him think he could.

"Smells good, doesn't it?" she humored him.

"Whatever you do is good. And I'm not saying that because I'm as hungry as a bear."

"So you're hungry as a bear," she said, trying to free herself from his encircling arm. "Then I'll hurry. I've been keeping the things warm in the oven."

"You shouldn't trouble yourself that way," he said, restraining her. "We can go downtown to eat when I'm late. It isn't right that you should have to wait for me."

"I like to wait for you. Isn't that all right?"

"Everything you say and do is—is just right."

"Even the roses?" she teased. "Do you think they're right, too?"

"You know I do. By the way, where did you plant them?"

"Come, I'll show you."

They walked around to the other side of the house where the roses were planted, each protected by two shingles driven slantwise into the ground. He looked critically at the many other plants growing in the strip of earth between the concrete walk and the foundation of the house, with most of which he was unfamiliar.

"Old-fashioned flowers?" he asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Donhagen gave them to me."

Because he did not like Mrs. Donhagen, he wanted to comment unfavorably on her gifts. The size of the plants, their location, and the number planted were things to find fault with. A second thought, more mature, made him decide that if Marcia wanted flowers and was willing to care for them he should not object, even if Mrs. Donhagen was the donor. But he could not forbear criticizing, at least a little, and he said, "Isn't it a little late in the season for transplanting?"

"Yes, it is," she agreed. "I spoke about that to Mrs.

Donhagen. She said plants will grow any time if they're given plenty of water. And I'll see to that."

A stray Maltese cat, in a recumbent position in the flower bed, was playfully pawing the drooping top of one of the plants; Blake bent over her and tickled her stomach with his forefinger, throwing her into spasms of feline delight. Blake laughed, and Marcia smiled in happy sympathy; he had laughed and smiled more since their marriage than he had during their entire previous acquaintance. It pleased her intensely. She felt that she was succeeding in making him happy.

Blake continued his tour of inspection by looking over the newly terraced ground. He was surprised at the improvements that had been made, though there had been no one around to collect from him for labor. The new lawn was green and closely cropped, the shrubs were spaded, the hedge was trimmed. Nothing had been neglected.

"Marcia, you didn't do all this alone?" he asked, suddenly suspicious.

"'I cannot tell a lie'," she quoted, smiling, "I did it all myself."

Blake was too conscious of having shirked his own responsibilities to respond to her mood. "Work of this kind is harmful to you," he objected. "A little mixed in with your housework doesn't hurt, but you're making a regular business of it."

"Look at these strong hands," she said, holding them out for inspection. "Don't they look as if they could work?"

He regarded them critically. They seemed to him too delicate to perform any but the lightest kind of labor.

"Hands like those shouldn't be abused," he said tenderly, taking them in his. Then he pointed to some stones piled about the pedestal of a bird-bath. "That's work for a man—a strong man. Why didn't you telephone to Sinvly and ask him to help you? You remember, I gave you his telephone number. He owes me money and he might just as well work out his debt. The next time you have anything like that to do, call him. He never pays me, anyway."

"Moving those rocks gave me the most trouble," she admitted. "Especially the big ones."

"You shouldn't have done it."

He wondered what the neighbors thought when they saw her struggling with the boulders. "Tight old Blake is too close to employ a man to do that work for his wife," they must have said.

"I don't mind working," she assured him. "It's good fun. You don't realize how strong I am." She raised her sleeve to display the bulge of her biceps as she slowly flexed her forearm. "Look at that muscle, Don. . . . Just look at it!"

"Great," he conceded shortly.

* * * * *

That evening, while Blake and Marcia were sitting in the porch-swing talking, Mrs. Folsom drew her electric motor up to the curb in front of their house. Marcia's heart had ached before for a car just like it, and it was aching now—secretly. She was confident that Blake would not refuse her if she asked him for one, but she continued to content herself with the thought that he would himself suggest her having one before long. If the time ever came when he was not so burdened with work. Even when looking at the dilapidated contrivance he spoke of as "the automobile" the thought never entered her mind that perhaps he was niggardly. Whatever he did was right—always right. To have considered him miserly would have placed her in the same category, for she had no other thought but that marriage means one mind, one heart, one soul.

Marcia, in typical middle-west country fashion, hastened down the walk to greet the caller. Mrs. Folsom had alighted and was admiring the Blakes' home and gardens.

"Isn't it funny," she commenced, "I never noticed before what a really lovely place you have here?"

Marcia smiled graciously, and turned to view the result of her efforts. "It does look pretty," she admitted.

"Just as nice as anything on Gentian Hill," Mrs. Folsom continued. "Really, it is."

"Oh, thank you! . . . We like it very much, the way we have it fixed."

They ascended the terrace steps and walked toward the house, arm-in-arm.

"I came to find out what day next week you can get away to go to Lake Lashaway," said Mrs. Folsom. "I was going to telephone, but I thought we could talk it over better this way."

"I must ask Don. He is awfully busy at present."

"Then a rest and change will do him good. Make him go."

Blake himself hailed them from the top of the porch steps. "Why didn't you bring Tom along?" he complained.

"That man was fussing with his tackles when I left," his wife responded gaily. "When he gets started with those nothing can drag him away. He's simply crazy about fishing. You know we're all due at Lashaway next week."

Blake looked a bit blank. "I was thinking," he began hesitatingly, while drawing up a chair for Mrs. Folsom. "I was thinking I might buy a new automobile before starting on that trip. The old one is about through. Had a lot of trouble today with the oiling system and the bearings. They told me at the garage that it'll be a week before they'll have it running again. Got to have a new one, that's all there is to it. Let's see. . . . It will take several days at least, to get what I want from Omaha. What day would we start?"

"We've planned on Tuesday."

He made a rapid mental calculation of the incidents involved in purchasing a motor car. The expenditure of so much money was a very serious business with him. "Saturday, Sunday, Monday—that'll be time enough. Sure, let's decide definitely to get started on Tuesday. I'll not let business keep me from going this time."

Marcia's reactions to this announcement were almost painfully violent. She adored her husband; she was so intensely happy over his plans that it was impossible for her to act natural. How guilty she would have felt if she had allowed herself to entertain, even for the briefest moment, the suspicion that he was a "tight-wad." He bought things as he saw need for them. What could be

more natural? When the proper time arrived, he would just as unceremoniously buy an electric car for her.

"And don't forget that you need at least two new suits of clothes to take along," she reminded him, watching him struggle rather awkwardly with his cigar. He had only recently begun to smoke, and had not yet learned to handle a cigar with dexterity. "And you'll need a new cap, too."

"I have a cap," he objected. "Have had it for years, but I never wear it except when I go to Lashaway. Last year I didn't even wear it then."

"Well, you need the suits, anyway."

"That linen suit I wore last year is as good as new. A little soiled, but a trip to the cleaner's will remedy that."

"The one with the buttons missing on the coat?"

"Did you notice that?"

"Yes."

"Well," he teased, "I'm not a bachelor any more."

"I say," Mrs. Folsom broke in, "make yourself just as comfortable as you can. That's what we're going for. What do you care what anyone thinks of the way you're dressed!"

Although Mrs. Folsom said this merely to put Blake in humor for taking the trip, as he had twice before found it necessary to postpone going, both Marcia and Blake attached a great deal of importance to her views. Their good opinion of her was offset only slightly by her rather flashy clothes, liberal use and abuse of cosmetics and overfondness for conspicuous jewelry. She considered herself so superior to the conventionalities that she never allowed them to affect her. If Blake, or any other man, wanted to go without buttons on their clothes, that was entirely their affair; if she preferred an abundance of cosmetics on her lips and cheeks, that was her own business; if it pleased Thomas Folsom to buy diamonds and platinum for her, that concerned no one but them. She was a despotic power in a little world of her own.

"I'll go fifty-fifty on buying clothes," Blake compromised. "I'll buy one suit."

"I think, perhaps, you can get along with that," Marcia gave in, thinking that he might again postpone going if

she was too insistent. "You're right, Edna; what do we care how we look?"

"Well, of course," said Mrs. Folsom, defending herself in view of recent purchases she had made, "women can't go about as shoddy as men can. You know, I've often wished I was a man."

So much settled, Blake devoted himself to reading a magazine, and the two women began discussing the contents of their wardrobes in an undertone.

Chapter III

Later that same evening Blake received a long distance telephone call from a colleague, asking him to make a trip of more than sixty miles the next morning to perform an operation. This would unexpectedly shorten the time he had allowed himself to prepare for Lashaway, and he worked far into the night on letters and papers that had been neglected but must be attended to before he was free to go on a vacation. Marcia helped him with whatever she could. As it was already late in the season, she was fearful lest he would again put off going, in which case it would probably result in a postponement of their trip until another year. It was nearly an hour after midnight when he finally put his work aside and retired.

With a nurse from the hospital, he started early the next day, leaving a note at his office stating he would not return before evening. But the journey and the operation required less time than he had anticipated, and he was back in Waverly shortly after three o'clock that afternoon.

It was with a sense of pride that he realized his reputation for being a "crank" because he invariably kept a complete record of his medical and surgical work. In two minutes, he could tell the technique employed, the pathological findings, and the results of the procedure of any one of the hundreds of operations he had performed. He did not do this to gratify a whim; he kept those records for subsequent reference when the patient returned for consultation, and he wanted to make further diagnosis on a comparative basis. As it was still early, he stopped at his office to record the day's case before going home. Contrary to his habit of entering his private office through a side door in the consultation room, he entered through the waiting room. As it was after office hours, he presumed that the attendant, following her usual custom, had

disposed of those who desired to see him that day. He cast a cursory glance about the waiting room as he entered. There was no one there except the girl in charge and a woman huddled in a large chair in the far corner of the room, partially hidden by a magazine she was reading. The attendant handed him a list of the people who had called during the day, which he scanned hastily. Then he looked up.

"Who's that over there?"

It was unusual for him to show interest in anyone in his outer office; out there they were of as little concern to him as the people on the streets, though they were transformed into something of inestimable worth as soon as they stepped into his consultation room.

"She wants to see you personally," said the attendant. "She refuses to give her name or answer the questions on the history chart."

The huddled figure in the chair lowered the magazine sufficiently to glance over its top at Blake, an apprehensive gleam in her piercing, dark eyes. The magazine began to quiver, and then her shaking hands dropped to her lap, coming up nervously an instant later to adjust her hat.

Blake nodded pleasantly. "Do you wish to see me?"

A strained smile curved her lips. "Yes, Doctor."

"Come in . . . this way, please."

She arose with an effort and came slowly toward Blake, who had walked to the door of his private office and was holding it ajar. She walked with a hesitant, uncertain step, her lips trembling painfully and one hand gripping the fingers of the other nervously, while her eyes were fixed appealingly on the doctor. She had not expected to find a man so formidable in appearance. His size, his awkward movements and brusque manner had all combined to terrify her. Once inside her muscles became flaccid and she sank into the chair he offered her, too uncertain of herself to attempt any action on her own initiative. She pulled herself together with an almost perceptible start. For a time Blake could think of nothing appropriate with which to open the conversation, painfully embarrassed by her unflinching, beseeching gaze. So he

pretended that some papers on his desk required his attention before he could proceed with her case. Then he glanced up at her casually, and observed that a mist was gathering in her eyes, forming into tears that grew larger and larger, but never spilled over. He knew positively what was confronting him.

The girl's pitiful predicament did not concern Blake except that he regarded with contempt her presumption that he would stoop to do anything for her. He was too well established, too well connected, too well thought of to even dream of engaging in any sort of irregular practice. He seethed with an inward exasperation, which was about to burst forth in a scathing denunciation of her, when he remembered that she had not yet explained why she was there.

"What is it you want to see me about?" he asked curtly. "I'm in a hurry."

For a moment there was no reply. The girl's face was buried in her hands. Then, without raising her head, she said, "Doctor, don't you know?"

"Of course, I don't!"

She looked up. "You must know what I am here for, Doctor Blake."

"Well, I guess I do. But I can't help you. . . . It's impossible for me to do anything in a case like yours. . . . You know that, too!"

"I should have known. . . . I did know. But I—I hoped. There was something that made me feel you might do something for me."

"It's absolutely out of the question! Furthermore, there ought to be a law to throw people in jail who solicit a doctor to do anything like that!"

She still clung to a forlorn hope that he had not definitely declined to aid her. "Then you refuse?"

"I certainly do!" he boomed. "Now I wish you would go."

Her body felt like lead as she lifted herself to her feet. "Thank you, Doctor," she whispered, "for your consideration."

"That's all right," he muttered ungraciously.

Just before she passed through the door she spoke

again. "I shouldn't have bothered you. You know, there's a better way, Doctor."

The door closed with a definite bang that seemed to awaken Blake to a keener consciousness of the misfortune that had befallen this girl. After all, he was not so big and resourceful but that he might be looking for advice or help before night.

"My God!" he breathed, crossing to an open window through which came the din of the busy street below. But the rumble of vehicles could not drown the ringing in his ears of the girl's final sentence. "Did I do right? Isn't there something I could have done for her besides refusing her so flatly?—something?—somehow?" He hurried into the waiting room, but she was not there. He opened the door and looked down the corridor—she was gone. Where? What was she going to do?

* * * * *

"Oh, well," Blake reassured himself on his way home, trying to free himself from the uncomfortable feeling induced by finding his thoughts dwelling persistently on the misfortunes of the girl. "She's just one of a great many. I can't help it if she harms herself."

He stressed the justifications for his own actions in the matter, vainly trying to exonerate himself of responsibility. Although everything that transpired in his office was strictly confidential, he decided to make an exception in this instance and tell Marcia. It would relieve him to talk to someone about it, even though, by taking Marcia into his confidence, he risked involving her in his own sense of alarmed concern for the strange girl's welfare.

He found plenty to occupy him in the garage when he arrived home, and later that evening he took Marcia to a picture show. In many ways the picture reminded him of the girl who had dragged her miserable body out of his office that afternoon, and for the first time he was aware of a desire to know who she was. He blamed himself for failing to obtain her name in the customary way; why had he neglected putting her through the same routine he required of other patients?

The unusual circumstances surrounding the whole occurrence became constantly more puzzling to him. As

his curiosity over the girl's identity increased, he wondered why he had failed to secure the information he now so much desired. Why had he not considered the matter more thoroughly before turning her away? As his uneasiness grew, it was further aggravated by the knowledge that Marcia was aware of his moodiness, though she asked sweetly, "What makes you so serious, Don? You're so quiet."

"Oh, I was thinking."

"About what?"

"The case at Belmont today," he lied. "I'm a little worried about the patient."

On the way home they stopped at the drug store for a cooling drink. Blake prolonged their stay talking to the clerk, who had studied medicine a year and had had some unusual experiences. Marcia played the phonograph and poached on the magazines in the rack while the two men continued to talk.

Blake arrived at home at last, very tired. He did not follow his nightly custom of reading awhile before retiring, something he seldom omitted even if he came in late. But all that night long he tossed restlessly. Nightmares visited him of a girl leaping from a bridge into a river, of lips stained with poison or burned white with acid, and he would waken and sit up in bed, terrified.

* * * * *

Contrary to his usual habit, Blake ate his breakfast the next morning hurriedly. Marcia observed his unusual behavior curiously. Aware of her unspoken questions, he wished he had told her the night before what was troubling him. He was tempted to tell her even now, but something he could not quite understand deterred him. So after kissing her and giving her an affectionate, if somewhat absent-minded, little pat on the arm, he hurried out to the garage, started the motor, and drove off at breakneck speed.

When she saw him driving in the direction of the hospital, Marcia reassured herself with the thought that it was the worry over some difficult cases that was troubling him. Then, as she continued to watch him, she thought she could see his automobile in the distance, speeding

past the hospital. Because she might be mistaken, she decided to telephone and find out if, after all, he had stopped there. But what would she say if he heard her asking for him? Looking around, she promptly found an excuse in his forgotten gloves. She went to the telephone, hesitated, and then concluded she was allowing herself to worry over nothing, so she returned to the kitchen and began clearing away the breakfast dishes.

Marcia was right. Blake had not stopped at the hospital, but had proceeded directly to his office. He wanted to question the woman in charge of the record files, hoping that she might be able to satisfy his curiosity concerning the identity of the girl whose predicament was affecting him so strangely.

"Have you the remotest idea as to the identity of the girl who was here when I came in yesterday?" he asked.

"I have not," was the unsatisfactory reply. "She was very careful not to tell who she was."

"She refused to give her name?"

"Or any other information concerning herself."

"While conversing with her," he persisted, "didn't you get some idea where she was from or where she was staying?"

"I didn't find out anything."

Thinking that the attendant might be forming her own opinion of his determination to obtain some information regarding this particular patient, he added nonchalantly, "I want to locate her. She forgot her purse."

"I'm sorry, but I'm unable to give you any information concerning her."

He thought deeply for a minute, then entered his private office and caught up the morning paper, eagerly scanning it for news of the girl's possibly attempted self-destruction during the night. He could find nothing with regard to her. Many thoughts flashed through his mind, one following the other so closely that his brain became a congested mass of half-formed ideas.

When he heard footsteps and low conversation in the waiting room, he wondered if it could possibly be the girl, returned to make a further appeal to him. He had difficulty restraining himself from breaking his established

custom not to appear in the waiting room from his private office unless he was summoned. When the electric buzzer announced that he was wanted, he hastened to the door. Although disappointed in not finding the one he was eager to see, it gave him far more satisfaction to find Jacques Dumont there with his crippled son.

Dumont, although no longer taking an active part in business, was the sole owner of the two leading industries in town, a gas-engine manufacturing plant and a structural steel works. These businesses had in the past years netted him millions of dollars, and he was by far the richest man in Waverly. But it seemed as if fate had decreed that the comfortable happiness that may quite naturally be expected to accompany such riches, should be curtailed by the crippling of his only son, which had followed an attack of infantile paralysis when the boy was sixteen. The shock had been too severe for his wife and she had died, breaking up their home just when they were prepared to enjoy life most fully.

For years Dumont had devoted most of his time to taking his son, now a man of thirty, to every place that boasted of an eminent orthopedic specialist, though without any resulting benefit to the cripple. Blake, therefore, considered their ultimate confidence in his ability a far greater asset to his reputation than anything he had heretofore achieved. While watching this case from a distance, he had seen the field gradually narrowing down to himself, and he anticipated nervously, but certainly, being called upon.

"We came early," explained the elder Mr. Dumont, "for I understand that your waiting list is large later in the day; we wanted to avoid the rush."

Those few words, spoken in that brief moment, had a tremendous influence on Blake. Changes usually take place suddenly in a person, and this had happened to him. These people were, then, among his clientele. He could see money, the thing that was of paramount importance to him, rolling in. He knew Dumont would not hesitate to spend a million, if only his son's health could be restored. What did the few paltry thousands he had hoarded together during his entire medical career amount

to compared with the amount of this single prospective fee? This consultation was the forerunner of a totally different view of himself.

"Yes, I usually have very busy afternoons," Blake agreed composedly. "I'm glad you came early, though I ought to be at the hospital even now."

"Forget about your other patients," the senior Dumont advised him. "Devote yourself entirely to my boy—if need be. Don't leave a stone unturned to help him—especially to relieve this new trouble he has developed. I am willing to pay well."

"Money is not the object I'm working for—it is success."

"My dear man," Dumont went on, as Blake shifted his son from one chair to another. "I know you won't fail me."

"I hope I won't."

The long and tedious examination was begun, much of which was as baffling to Blake as to the Dumonts. At times the senses of his fingers and ears ran wild, for he was losing himself in visions of what this case meant to him.

The doctor had evidently made a favorable impression on the Dumonts, for he obtained their promise to have the invalid submit to an operation and thereafter follow his directions for the period of one year, the time he had allowed himself to obtain desired results. It was long after the noon-hour before the examination was completed and the patient was rolling down the corridor toward the elevator in his wheel chair. Blake crossed to the window and looked down into the busy street below, mentally congratulating himself on his success, and anticipating for himself a wonderful future. And in the midst of his triumph he forgot about the silly little goose who had brought unnecessary trouble upon herself.

* * * * *

Blake was busy when the telephone bell sounded late that day in the tiresome way it always did: the buzzer, with its monotonous drone, two short rings followed by a long one, announcing that he was wanted. He was very deliberate about answering.

"Is this Doctor Blake?" inquired an anxious voice, when he had picked up the receiver and indicated his readiness to listen.

"Yes."

There was the sound of confused voices and loud thumping, and then another voice sounded over the wire. "Doctor, can you come right over?"

"Who's talking?"

"This is Mrs. Gardle at *The Farwell Rooms*."

"Yes, Mrs. Gardle. What is the trouble?"

There was a brief pause, during which he could hear the woman admonishing someone. "For God's sake," she was imploring, "don't attract the police." She again directed her voice into the telephone. "I think a roomer took poison!"

"Poison?"

"I think so. Come down as quick as you can!"

"I'll be right over."

The Farwell Rooms was a disreputable lodging house, occupying a dilapidated building that had been at one time the leading hotel in the older part of the town. It was located on the bank of the river, in the midst of all the stench and filth that accumulates even in small cities. To the north were the stockyards; across the river was a slaughter-house that discharged its refuse in the stream; to the south were freight depots and railroad yards; while on the west, it was bordered by a few small stores and cottages grimy with a generation's smoke and dirt. The discouraged trees about the dingy houses and in front of *The Farwell Rooms* were green, but their stunted size provided a vivid illustration of arrested development.

Mrs. Gardle was a person about whom there was no doubt of her standing in life. She had started on the down grade by accepting the easiest means of livelihood while she was still quite young, ultimately to find herself conducting a rooming-house that tolerated the vermin that infested it as unconcernedly as it did the fetid odors of the vicinity. Despite the fact that her place was a rendezvous for varlets and harlots alike, where the police naturally looked first when they were hunting criminals,

the local force credited Mrs. Gardle with conducting her business strictly within the law.

It was to this place that Blake hurried on receipt of the urgent telephone call. Mrs. Gardle, disarmingly prim and neat, met him at the door. She led the way up a long, dark stairway, through a long, dark hallway. He could hear a low moaning somewhere, and as he followed his guide, doors opened all along the hall and women of questionable appearance stood and watched their progress. Some looked on in an attitude of hard indifference, while others seemed to view the situation with sympathetic concern.

At the door of the last room Mrs. Gardle stopped and waved Blake in, indicating she was not inclined to enter herself. There was no one in the room except the dark-eyed girl whom Blake had seen in his office the previous day. She was lying on a bed that still retained a few chips of its original coat of green paint, writhing with pain. She alternately bit and pawed the pillow and the filthy quilt that covered her body.

"Is there anything you'll want, Doctor?" asked Mrs. Gardle from the doorway.

"I don't know yet what I'll need," he said, "but I wish you would remain here, Mrs. Gardle."

She stepped in and closed the door. "Do you think she took poison?"

Blake cast a glance about the room, and failing to observe anything to indicate that she might have taken poison, he said, "Does it look like a case of poisoning to you?"

Mrs. Gardle also made a survey of the room. "No, it doesn't."

"I have been treating her for stomach trouble," Blake instantly invented. "She is subject to these attacks."

"Oh, I see."

He took her pulse and found it rapid and thready; her pupils were normal, but her face was extremely cyanotic.

"She's a sick girl."

"Where does she live?" Mrs. Gardle asked.

"I don't remember. Didn't she register when she engaged her room?"

"I don't have a register," Mrs. Gardle explained. "I suppose I should have one. You know, I make strangers pay in advance. It saves trouble and expense. The poor thing had just enough money to pay for two days."

Blake was not yet certain that it was a case of poisoning, except that he was suspicious of her strangely perfumed breath. "I'm going to wash her stomach," he said, looking up. "Will you bring a pitcher of tepid water, Mrs. Gardle?"

"Sure. . . . Trepid, did you say?"

"Yes. Lukewarm."

The little woman left the room and hurried downstairs. Blake knelt beside the bed. "Good heavens, little girl, what did you do?" he asked. He lifted her head in his hands. "You took poison, didn't you? Tell me, what did you take?"

"Oh, Doctor, let me die," she pleaded. "Please let me die."

"I won't let you die. . . . You're not going to die! Tell me, what did you take?"

She clasped her hand over his arm and pulled him closer to her. "Formaldehyde," she whispered. "You can't keep me from dying."

"How much did you drink?"

"All I could. The bottle is in my bag."

Blake opened the small, new valise that stood in a corner beside a broken-down dresser. He found a three-ounce bottle, nearly empty. "Poison" glared at him in bold red letters on the label. Beneath it the word "Formalin" was written in ink.

"Was this bottle full?"

"Yes," she gasped.

"And you drank all of it?"

"As much as I could. I—it strangled me so."

She raised herself up in bed, but the strain was too severe, and it seemed as if something vital within her gave way. She became rigid with muscular spasms. When the paroxysm subsided her bodily strength went with it, and she fell back exhausted. Her limp body heaved violently, and each labored breath came with a crackling gurgle deep in her throat.

Blake was administering a hypodermic stimulant when Mrs. Gardle came in with the water. This done, he hastily prepared a stomach-tube and set to work. The girl, although greatly weakened, had enough reflex strength left to desperately fight him off. But with Mrs. Gardle's aid, he succeeded in siphoning a solution from her stomach that had a strong odor of formaldehyde.

"U-u-u-u-h," shuddered Mrs. Gardle, "such a sour stomach! No wonder she was in pain!"

"Ulcers," Blake explained. "An old case of it."

For two hours Blake worked with his patient, at times almost despairing of her life. But he finally succeeded in helping her breathe more easily, and watched with satisfaction the color of her face change from a deep cyanotic to a flushed pink.

"Did you say that her account here was settled?" he asked Mrs. Gardle.

"She's paid up until tonight."

"I'm going to take her to the hospital."

"No, no," the girl feebly protested.

Blake disregarded her opposition.

"How are you going to take her?" Mrs. Gardle asked.

"I was thinking about that. In my car, I guess."

Mrs. Gardle assumed a doubtful mien. "You can't very well do it alone?"

"I'll try it."

"I'll get Dye to lend you a hand," she said, and pattered down the hall.

"Please don't take me to a hospital," the girl begged. "Please don't."

"You need care," Blake explained. "You can't get it here. It would be a disgrace to leave a person as sick as you are in this place."

Her only reply to this was a despairing groan.

A few minutes afterward a tall, cadaverous man, collarless and in shirt sleeves, came in. He silently assumed a position off to one side, but his attitude indicated that he was ready to receive and execute orders.

"Are you Dye?" Blake demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"All right, you go down to the car. I'll get her that far, but you'll have to help me lift her in."

* * * * *

It was with difficulty that Blake finally installed her in the little automobile the garage had loaned him while his car was being repaired. On the way over to the hospital he said, "Your name is Margaret Jones when you arrive at the hospital. I'm treating you for stomach trouble. You've been my patient for a long time, and your home is in a distant town. Any town forty or fifty miles away will do, except the one that's really your home."

The girl's clouded brain was too dulled to grasp his meaning. "That is not my name," she objected weakly. "My name is Phyllis Girard, and my home is in Williston."

"For the present it is best that you follow my instructions," he tried to calm her. "In a few days you'll be able to think for yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"I haven't time to explain now. Just do as I say and everything will be all right."

Phyllis buried her face in her hands. "I wish I could think," she muttered desperately. "I'll never be able to think again."

"Yes, you will, but you must take it easy for a while."

Although a thousand thoughts crowded her brain, it was some time before one stood out clear—quite clear. What impulse had suddenly seized this man that he should now assume to become her protector? Why was he suddenly taking such an interest in her?

"You must not take me to the hospital," she insisted, seizing the wheel. He brushed her hand away so easily that she realized she was indeed too weakened to offer any physical resistance to him. "Even though I haven't any money I won't accept your help," she continued. "I'll get out of this somehow—myself, if I have to do—" She paused and clenched her hands in abject terror. "Oh, *what* will I do?" she pleaded.

Up to this time Blake had been acting as doctor-to-

patient in the case, but her pitiful wailing now touched the man-to-woman chivalry within him.

"I'll take care of you," he assured her gently. "I'll see to everything. Some day, when you are able, you can repay me."

She tried to fathom his sudden change of attitude toward her—his brusque refusal to even talk to her the day before, his skilled medical attention today, and now his real consideration for her future welfare. But her girlish brain, dulled from the suffering she had endured, was in a maze, and she could not correlate her thoughts. An aching head, aggravated by an annoying tingling of her body, a numbness of her hands and feet, that made her entire body quiver, all combined to make her feel that her own judgment was not to be relied upon.

"I'll do as you want me to," she yielded, as Blake brought his automobile to a standstill in front of the hospital. "I'll follow your advice until I can think for myself."

* * * * *

Marcia was waiting for Blake, sitting on the steps of the driveway stoop, when he drove up the winding concrete strips a little more recklessly than usual that night. His mind was not really on the driving, for he was mentally weighing what he had done for Phyllis, wondering if he had acted rightly.

The tramp Maltese cat—the feline had become a member of the household through adoption—was rubbing its sides against Marcia's skirts, and greeted Blake with furious purrings when he mounted the steps.

"You look too sweet for anything," Blake told Marcia as she smiled up at him.

"Dear boy," she retaliated.

He bent over and buried his face in her fluffy, just-washed hair, then kissed it.

"You look tired, Don," she said sympathetically, getting up. "You look as if you didn't feel well."

"I am tired," he admitted. "It seems as if my endurance isn't what it used to be. Ten years ago this would have been—" He caught himself lamenting, and that was

inconsistent with his creed. "I'm just a little fagged, that's all."

He hastened into the house. Marcia knew him too well not to be certain that there was something besides fatigue the matter, but she followed him in silence.

"I'm glad your vacation is so near," she said when she observed his poor appetite. "I spoke to Mrs. Folsom over the telephone this afternoon; she said that Mr. Folsom may not be able to go with us. . . . He will follow in a day or two."

"I'm not sure about getting away myself next Tuesday," he surprised her. "My work is not shaping up as nicely as I had expected. Everything seems gummed up. The dealer told me today that it will rush him to get the car here by that time; the tailor says it will be almost impossible for him to get the suit out that I ordered; had a letter today from Worth, my surgical assistant, stating he'll not be back before Thursday, and we can't both be away at the same time."

Marcia's face was clouded in bitter disappointment. "Donald, dear, you're not going to be a slave to your work any longer. I won't let you! I'll spend less on myself if my extravagance is keeping you tied down. And I can keep house more economically if I must."

Her reference to her extravagance, which he knew to be a myth, sounded almost like a reproach. "Don't you worry about me," he blustered. "Any man is liable to feel a bit dumpish at times. . . . That's no sign I'm going to die soon."

"Of course, it isn't," laughed Marcia. "You're intentionally exaggerating."

"Well, I thought you were, too."

"So I was. Now then, that we've compromised on that, you'll go to Lashaway Tuesday?"

That settled it; he told her that nothing could make him disappoint her.

* * * * *

As far as the Blake household was concerned, the days that followed until Tuesday were uneventful, but Phyllis came in for more attention. She had apparently fully recovered from her terrible experience, and with it she

had visibly changed from a sorrowful girl who had welcomed death to one who again saw prospects of happiness in living.

It was Monday, the day before the Blakes and Mrs. Folsom were to go to Lashaway, that Phyllis was able to leave the hospital. She came to Blake's office and, among other patients, registered with the attendant for an appointment—under the name of Margaret Jones. Her absolute reliance in him made the doctor suspect that her reasoning might have become slightly deranged by what she had suffered and he questioned her very closely. He was too shrewdly observant to let even the minutest revelation escape him. To the casual observer, the girl gave no evidence of abnormality, but Blake found her mentality sufficiently impaired to make him apprehensive. Whether the condition was acute or chronic, the result of worry or poison, he had not yet determined. The fact that she had resigned herself to his care as completely as if she were his very own was enough to cause him real concern. Phyllis was not reminding Blake of any promise he had made, but her actions plainly indicated that she was relying on him as her protector, and he was not cruel enough to disappoint her.

"I'll be glad to do anything within reason for you," said Blake, feeling around in an attempt to free himself from the hold she had on him. "What do you want me to do?"

"What can you do?"

She spoke with hard indifference, and if Blake had not known that her father, whom he knew through business transactions with his firm, was an honest and very pious man, he might have thought that he was dealing with the results of a lack of upbringing. But he knew that few girls are reared in a better environment than she had had at home.

He was emphatic when he spoke again. "I'll make the man marry you!" he asserted.

Phyllis was dumbfounded. So that was what his offer to help her consisted of! She studied him closely for a moment. "You know that that part has been settled," she

said thickly. "That is out of the question. I've told you that before."

Blake was insistent. "What could be more right than to compel him to do that?"

"A marriage under compulsion?"

"Yes—in a case of this kind."

She wanted to tell him how contemptible he sounded, but he had already done much for her and she resolved not to test his good nature too far.

"It can never be," she pleaded. "Please don't think it can."

"Who is he?"

"Please Doctor Blake, how many times must I ask you not to speak of that? I beg you, I implore you not to make my humiliation greater than it is. I have explained to you that I left my home because I wouldn't divulge the name of the man. He is no more to blame than I am. When I went to my mother—I always told her everything—for advice, she in turn informed my father, and his solution of the problem was to find the man and kill him. When I refused to tell his name I was told to leave home—and here I am. Please, Doctor Blake, won't you try and understand? We must find some other way—if you really want to help me. I think you do; but first of all you must understand. You frustrated my attempt to kill myself without an understanding knowledge of what it was all about; now you are endeavoring to remedy a condition that cannot be remedied—without an understanding knowledge."

She had apparently not said all she wanted to say, but she could not get further.

Blake pulled himself abruptly to his feet. "I'm sorry," he said. "I meant well. Trying to help you the way I thought you wanted to be helped was what prompted me to say what I did. You make some suggestion and I'll see that it's carried out."

There was a determined glint in her eyes as she raised her head sharply.

"I'm going through with it," she stated. "Where or how, I don't know. But I am going through!"

He brightened. "I have it! That little house of mine

out on the north limits of town is just the thing. It is isolated enough to be—to be a sort of retreat. There is only one other house nearby; an Austrian track worker and his family live there. You won't have any inquisitive neighbors to interfere with you, and still there'll be some one close enough if you should want them. It's just the place for you. Nobody has lived in it for a year and it is badly in need of repairs. I'll send a carpenter out at once to make it habitable. You can live at the hotel until it's ready for occupancy."

"I'm worrying about the hospital account," she admitted. "It is the only money I owe—except what I owe you."

He considered carefully before he spoke again, trying to decide whether to keep on binding himself more and more firmly to a random promise, or to tell her that he could do nothing more for her.

"The hospital expense has been taken care of," he said at length. "As for the other, I'll give you a life lease on the house, with a clause in it that the first rental must be paid at the end of five years or you forfeit your rights." He laughed. "Isn't that a scheme for you?"

The girl tried to show that he was pleasing her, but the momentary brightening of her eyes had hardened into a blank stare. Her pride, the thing that had prompted her to attempt self-destruction rather than accept charity, was making a final protest. "I don't want t—o——"

Her voice failed her. And then, without warning, she swooned and fell before Blake could reach her. He bent over her apprehensively. Her lips were bloodless, her hands clammy, her pulse almost imperceptible. He took the slender form in his arms and placed it on a lounge, making a hasty examination.

"Internal hemorrhage," he diagnosed her sudden attack. "Undoubtedly the effect of the poison. Poor, poor thing! Didn't she have enough as it was?"

He realized there must be no time lost if he was to save her life. He summoned Worth, who had returned that day in response to a telegram, and they took her to the hospital. After a brief consultation, an operation was decided upon and immediately performed. About an

hour later, as she was reviving from the anesthetic, Blake stood at the bedside. "She's coming through the operation splendidly," he assured the nurse. "But give her close attention."

Chapter IV

To be a guest at *The Rockcliff Hotel* is an indication that you are on the inside of Lashaway society. Even if such a distinction does not carry much weight, there is nevertheless considerable satisfaction attached to it, especially for those who presume that they are among the few who are financially able to maintain it.

Because the people who came to *The Rockcliff* annually were of the better class, supposedly equipped with the intellect to appreciate the unusual, Blake was fond of promenading the wide verandas of the hotel, presumably for the edification of the other guests. Ever since boyhood he had been inclined to self-consciousness which made him feel conspicuous among people away from home. He greatly enjoyed the feeling of aloof superiority which voluntary detachment from the society of others afforded him. He was happy in imagining that people who did not know him well stopped to look back when he passed them, and that they said, "There is a brilliant young physician. It is said that he's made a fortune in surgery."

Still, vacationing was as much of a business with Blake as was the amputation of a leg. He patronized *The Rockcliff* because he knew that its cuisine, bathing beach, golf course, and service were superior to anything the other places on the shores of Lashaway offered. His appearance in such a desirable environment reflected credit upon his taste and position in the world, and he went golfing and motoring merely because to do so was fashionable among *The Rockcliff* guests, though he would rather have lounged along the beach in old clothes, watching the bathers.

Such being the case, in a place where entertainment is as limited as it usually is at summer resorts, it is easy to imagine that Blake soon found life unbearably irksome at Lake Lashaway. But he kept himself busy and happy

by devoting himself to Marcia, content to row and dance and walk and talk with her. That was his opinion of ideal relaxation.

"Such sweethearts," teased Mrs. Folsom when she discovered them on a deserted veranda, preferring to sit silent in the moonlight to joining the crowd of dancers. "I've looked an hour for you."

Blake arose reluctantly. "Surely, not an hour."

Mrs. Folsom consulted her wrist-watch with difficulty in the moonlight. "Fifty-three minutes by my watch," she stated.

"Well," Marcia defended herself, "I told Don several times we ought to be going in."

"I was in no hurry about it," he admitted. "I don't know why."

"We were to dance the second dance together," Mrs. Folsom reminded him. "And they're dancing the—" She paused to look at her card. "This is the fifth."

"I'm sorry I forgot about our dance," he apologized.

"If it isn't too late," said Marcia, getting up, "let's go now."

"There is plenty of time," Mrs. Folsom assured her, taking Marcia by the arm and moving toward the stairs. "We'll have time to dance all we want."

As Blake hurried after the two women, he tripped, and would have fallen, on the last step of the flight from the porch; but in floundering about he lurched heavily against Mrs. Folsom's shoulder, saving himself from a nasty tumble.

"I hope you won't dance as heavily as that," she rebuked him.

"I couldn't see," he tried to excuse himself. "There ought to be a light somewhere on these stairs." He gazed about, adding when his look encountered a fixture, "Well, there is one. They must be saving the juice."

"It's the worn-out matting," Marcia interceded for him. "I caught my foot on the same step this morning."

Fortunately the music struck up just then. Blake felt a sensation of clumsiness in all his muscles as Marcia stepped out on the floor with him, but they glided away with wonderful ease and grace. He was glad, exultantly

glad, that he danced well, for he was not certain that Marcia was not a little provoked over his stumbling, though she had defended him against Mrs. Folsom's allusion to his unwieldiness.

"That was unforgivably awkward of me," he apologized.

"What?"

"Stumbling on the stairs like a drunken man."

"Who cares?"

"I think Edna didn't like it."

"If she didn't," scoffed Marcia, "that's all the satisfaction she'll get out of it."

"Then you aren't influenced by what she thinks of me?"

"Why, Don," she whispered, "such an idea is preposterous!"

"You're a darling."

"Remember, dear, I love you."

He smiled and tightened his arm about her. They danced on, loving each other more ardently than when they were sweethearts.

The music stopped and they found Mrs. Folsom spreading her ample self on two chairs, holding one for Marcia.

"I owe you an apology," said Mrs. Folsom softly, touching Blake's arm. "You dance beautifully."

"I was about to make you say that," Marcia threatened, laughingly.

"Is that the first time you've seen me dance?" asked Blake, wondering.

"Yes. You know, I don't go to dances at home."

Blake considered a moment. "You were at the first Elks' ball I attended in Waverly," he reminded her.

"But I wasn't interested in you then," she laughed.

* * * * *

The following morning, two days behind schedule, Folsom arrived at *The Rockcliff*, loud in his complaints over the silliness of coming to a resort to transact business. The word 'vacation' was not in his vocabulary, though there was nothing he enjoyed more than an occasional fishing trip, similar to those he went on when a boy. He believed in 'roughing it.' That was what made the coarsest food palatable and the hardest bed comfortable.

Because he intended going out for a few days' real fishing as soon as he concluded his business in connection with his stay at *The Rockcliff*, he immediately got into communication with his political confreres, Judge Eustis Day and Governor Finis Goodrich, there by prearrangement. He seemed to derive keen satisfaction out of combining business with pleasure when he was forced to seek pleasure.

Also, while loitering about in apparent idleness, he was determined to put the time to good account by means of some of the rather cheap publicity with which he hoped to further his political career. This was easily accomplished, for his bulky form and limping left foot made him a conspicuous and impressive figure. While it was not actually necessary for him to carry a cane, he always had one, a heavy congo stick, bound at each end with gold; and he made elaborate use of it to round out gestures and cudgel pebbles and blades of grass with its tapering golden ferrule.

His two political colleagues were more than a little worried over the outcome of the forthcoming election. Each had held his incumbency for several terms, but was increasingly apprehensive about the future at the thought of the dwindling plurality that had elected them each succeeding time. The vote of the women had been cast almost solidly against them.

"We need some capable women in our ranks," averred Governor Goodrich. "Our organization won't amount to the proverbial tinker's damn next November unless we have them with us. I can see now that we've been too careless in considering them while figuring their strength. They represent a powerful factor and their support is increasingly important to have. It's clear to me that the political faction that harmonizes on this point, the one enlisting the women's support by granting them a few concessions, will be the one to watch." He paused, scratched his gray head, asked for confirmation. "Judge, you know the ropes pretty well. What do you think about it?"

Judge Day scowled as he always did when considering some weighty matter. He was thinking of the narrow

margin that had returned him to the bench the last time. "I believe you're right," he assented.

Goodrich looked at Folsom triumphantly. "Of course, I'm right."

"It seems to me something startling will have to be done to give either of us a victory this fall," Day continued, looking rather dolefully at Goodrich. "There's no question but that you are right regarding the women. However, some of my advisers have informed me that we've lost ground through too much feminine meddling already."

Goodrich shot a questioning glance at Folsom, who seemed to be finding diversion in teasing a pebble with his walking-stick. To feign indifference at times when his opinion was eagerly sought, allowing those who were looking for it to entangle themselves in the meshes of their own miscalculations, was a trick that had carried him beyond mere local fame as a politician. His colleagues grew increasingly uncomfortable as he remained obviously unimpressed by the importance of their discussion. But the more they chafed the better pleased he was.

"What is your opinion on that, Folsom?" Goodrich asked at length, making a real attempt to sound impressive. "I'd stake more on your judgment in a matter of that kind than any other man I know."

"Probably you could find some bright woman who would give you pretty good advice on that," he replied cryptically, without looking up.

Goodrich was angry. "Don't make light of something that is a vital matter, Tom."

Folsom remained silent and continued to make the little stone jump impishly.

Judge Day demanded irritably, "You're not backing down on us too, are you?"

This was just the opening Folsom wanted. He lifted his head slowly and looked gravely at one and then the other.

"No!" he stated emphatically. "I'm not backing down—I'm bucking up. I think you understand me when I say that. If you don't, I'll explain in a few words. If men like you did some real thinking and less worrying the results would be more satisfactory! I warned you last

time. I predicted you would be down on your knees begging for the women's vote before another election."

He was about to make a demand upon his henchmen, and he was leading up to it with careful precision. It was his aim to make these men conscious of the precariousness of their positions. By proceeding slowly he was giving them an opportunity to feel the difficulty of the situation more keenly. Those who depended on him for public support were never allowed to forget that they were profoundly indebted to him.

"Even a wise man is liable to overlook a safe bet," Goodrich blustered.

"But we evidently aren't wise men!" interjected Day.

"Under your supervision the Third District has been handled as well as any in the State," confirmed Goodrich, ignoring what the other had said. "The Third isn't worrying me. As long as you're at the helm there we are assured of success. But you've restricted yourself too exclusively to that District in the past. My plan is this: I would like to have you take charge of the State election this Fall."

Folsom was pleased, with reservations. It always took some persuasion to convince him of the advisability of any innovation, any offer made in a spirit of bravado held little attraction for him. Goodrich had made his statement with apparent sincerity, but Folsom was wary. And he was right, for Goodrich thought he was effectively patting this crafty politician on the back and throwing him off his balance. But under such conditions Folsom was wont to tread very warily, making demands, and refusing to commit himself. Whenever he did promise his aid, it was always contingent on something else, and he constantly held the sword over the heads of those with whom he dealt.

"Is my opinion as valuable as that to you?" he asked skeptically.

Goodrich could not very well temporize, now that he had definitely committed himself. Folsom had him just where he wanted him.

"We not only need your opinion," he said, "but we need your help as well."

And here Folsom sprung a surprise. "Then remove Jim Gleason from office!" he demanded.

Goodrich gasped. Jim Gleason was State Fire Marshal, and as a result of political jealousy had a short time before condemned a frame building in Waverly that belonged to Folsom. This incident, which was an evidence of poor judgment on the part of Gleason so shortly before election, had increased the already bitter hatred between the two men. Folsom was determined to even the score by putting Gleason out of office. Gleason, however, was a cunning politician, and had been largely instrumental in electing Goodrich, giving him a strong hold on the governor.

"You are asking the impossible," blustered Goodrich.

"Then you'll do one of two things," Folsom assured him. "You can't raise sheep and wolves in the same pen."

"Just what do you mean?"

"That you'll have to drop one of us—that's what I mean."

There was silence for a time. Folsom resumed his little game with the pebble. The judge and the governor watched him, Goodrich reflecting that he himself was in something of the same relative position to Folsom as the pebble.

"I know Jim has treated you mighty rotten," said Day at length. "I don't blame you a bit for feeling the way you do. However, this is no time to deliberately create party dissention."

Folsom stopped tapping with his cane, but remained silent.

"That's it," agreed Goodrich. "Discord at this time would mean disaster."

"Then you'd better prepare for disaster—unless you get rid of Gleason."

"Tom, I can't believe that you've thought this over carefully," remonstrated Judge Day.

"If you had," interposed Goodrich, "you'd see the importance of avoiding party strife at a time like this rather than creating it. That and the votes of the women are

the only things the opposition is building its hopes on. We can't afford to let it come about!"

"Don't you see, that's just what I'm trying to do," said Folsom, making one of his well-known gestures with his cane. "But the more you talk the more firm I am in my opposition to Gleason! Unless he goes, my influence will be thrown elsewhere."

"Gleason is no fool," the Judge expostulated. "He could do a lot of harm if he was turned loose."

"It takes a following to do that, and he hasn't got it. Besides that, he's in bad repute—favoritism has made him undesirable."

Goodrich studied Folsom critically. "Do you really believe that?" he asked doubtfully.

"I know it to be the truth."

"Then you have my word that he'll be asked to resign."

Folsom arose as he saw the Blakes, accompanied by his wife, drive up in their new sedan and stop for him. "I'll consider the suffrage question and see you about it later," said he, and limped toward the waiting car. "There's a solution for it, all right," he added, over his shoulder.

And when he looked up he saw the answer—Marcia.

* * * * *

It so happened that Blake was the only physician vacationing at *The Rockcliff*. Early one Sunday morning there was a furious knocking on his door, and a voice called insistently, "Doctor Blake! Come quickly! Some persons have been drowned!"

"Wait just a minute and I'll be with you," he called in answer, already out of bed and fumbling for his clothes. "Where are they?"

"On Pier Four."

"Have them laid face down and keep raising and lowering the bodies at the hips."

A few minutes later Blake, scantily clad, emerged from his room. An excited man grasped him by the arm, and together they hurried along the veranda, stumbling over rugs, chairs and settees.

The unfortunate persons were a girl of six years and her colored nurse. They had been in the water so long

that it required tremendous efforts to resuscitate them. The mother of the little girl, the wife of an up-state country grocer, was pacing wildly up and down the pier, denouncing the colored woman for having neglected her duty. Although the life of her child was at stake, the mother's grief was diverted into the strangest channels. She protested loudly that she was paying the maid twice as much as she had ever received before, and that she might have shown her appreciation by attending faithfully to her duties! To think that she had allowed the child to ruin her clothes when she was all ready to go to church!

The little girl was the first to revive, and her mother began immediately to shower her with reproofs and admonitions. When the nurse was restored to consciousness, she turned on her with vehemence. "Gracie Grace," she shouted, gritting her teeth and speaking through them, "you're fired! Don't you come near my house again; I won't let them take you there! Do you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am," was all the bewildered Gracie could reply.

"Where can we take her?" Blake demanded, thoroughly disgusted with the woman's callousness.

"Me and my woman'll take her in with us," offered a colored porter. "Le's take her right up, Budge," he added, speaking to another of his race.

"All right," said Blake, "you do that and I'll be over to see her in a little while." And he hastened after Mrs. Harman, the child's mother, who immediately became very affable, apparently oblivious to the distressing condition of her daughter.

The Harman family lived in a cottage some distance back of *The Rockcliff*, where it was necessary to pass through a very undesirable collection of taverns and cottages to reach it. For the most part the occupants of these were actual trespassers when they availed themselves of the finely appointed bathing beach in front of the hotel, which was the exclusive property of *The Rockcliff Beach Hotel Company*. Mrs. Harman was one of these, but she went even further, posting all of her letters at *The Rockcliff*, so they would bear its postmark and give her friends

at home the impression that she was staying there as a guest.

When the child was comfortably tucked in bed, Blake gave instructions for the mother to follow.

"Come back this afternoon and see how she is getting along," she urged as Blake was leaving. "I wouldn't think of neglecting the youngster. Say, do you think the nigger girl will get well?"

"She has some water left in her lungs. . . . That sometimes terminates seriously. I'm going over now to see her."

Mrs. Harman lifted her head disdainfully.

* * * * *

Gracie was in a serious condition when Blake arrived at the house to which she had been taken. The water remaining in her air passages had settled to the lower part of her lungs making it necessary for her to struggle so desperately for breath that it required several persons to hold her in bed. With her hands above her head, she eventually raised herself to a sitting posture, uttering half-articulate words and sentences.

"Don' lemme die, Doctor," was one appeal she brought out quite clearly. "I don' wanna die!"

"My God!" muttered Blake. "She's instinctively fighting for life, as Phyllis did."

"What is you sayin', Doctor?" demanded Gracie, hearing him mumbling. "Is I mos' serious?"

"Not very," he soothed her. But he dared not allow his thoughts go wool-gathering, for Gracie was sick and he must get to work.

It was after mid-day before he thought it safe to leave her. The guests at *The Rockcliff* were congregated about the dining-room door, waiting for it to open, when he returned to his room to dress. Marcia was waiting for him as he came in, humming.

"You poor soul," she sympathized, "they don't even give you rest up here."

"You know, Marcia," he assured her, "I got a lot of satisfaction out of what I did this morning. The gratitude of those poor colored people was very touching."

Marcia smiled. She was thinking of the time he had

objected when she applauded a colored act at *The Orpheum* in Omaha several years ago, but she made no reply, listening to him whistling and humming while he dressed. Yes, he had changed. He had changed for the better.

* * * * * * *

Gracie developed pneumonia, and Blake, not having his kit with him, was unprepared to give the case proper care. Although the woman's natural resistance was remarkable and her determination to recover even greater, it was extremely doubtful whether she would survive. Once more he mentally compared her case with that of Phyllis. The one was fighting to live and the other had fought to die. Yet it seemed that neither was to get her wish; he was receiving daily reports from Worth stating that Phyllis was making slow but certain progress toward recovery.

Then, a few days later, Gracie edged up to and passed through the crisis, and thereafter she made rapid improvement.

"You've made the grade, Gracie," he assured her cheerfully. "You're the winner in one of the bravest fights I ever saw."

Gracie adored him. "I know I owes my life to you, Doctor Blake," she said. "I wishes I could pay you. . . . I never can—'cause I has nothin' to pay you with."

"You could pay me by working for me," Blake suggested.

"Oh, lordy! I only wishes you meant it."

"I do."

"Honest?"

"Yes. . . . Honest. I want you to keep house for a widow whose husband died of ptomaine poisoning a short while before I came up here. She nearly died, too, and her condition is such that she will need an attendant and housekeeper for a long time. She asked me to find someone like you for her."

Gracie pondered deeply. "You says work for *you*?" she reminded him.

"Well, wouldn't you take the position with her for me?"

"Sure I will," she conceded. "Ise willin' to do mos' anything for you, Doctor Blake."

"The two of you won't have any trouble getting along. Margaret Jones is her name—Mrs. Margaret Jones."

* * * * *

Blake had all of his mail forwarded to *The Rockcliff*. There was a great deal of it, for he had many patients in distant towns who were continually writing for advice. Marcia did not like the idea. One morning, while he was occupied in opening letter after letter and carefully reading each one, she felt it was time for a wifely objection.

"Why don't you allow your mail to accumulate at home?" she asked seriously. She did this, realizing it was not wise to interrupt him while he was busy.

"What for?" he snapped.

"The strain of reading and answering so many letters is too much like your routine work at home. You need relaxation."

"I wish you wouldn't worry about me!" he said, without even looking up.

Marcia said no more and continued her preparations to go in bathing with the eleven o'clock crowd. But she must and did worry about him, especially over his outburst, which indicated an irritability quite new for him.

"He works too hard," she defended him in her own mind. "Unless I get him entirely away from it for a while he'll go to pieces." She studied him while she was putting on her bathing shoes. "But how silly I am allowing myself to become! A veritable picture of health like he will never suffer from a breakdown. He's just a man—one of the millions of men who complain with the same vigor when women are over-attentive as when they are inattentive."

She was so quiet that he looked up to see what she was doing. When he observed her smiling to herself, apparently oblivious to him, he was gratified that she had not been hurt by his brusqueness.

When she was ready to go down she asked: "You're not going in the water now?"

"No, thanks," he replied. "I had a dandy swim early this morning. I believe you were asleep when I got out. You know, I like to get out there when there isn't such a crowd. I would go in again if I wasn't busy with this

mail. You remember, we're going to the Fair at Elmwood this afternoon."

"That's so," she said. "I had forgotten about that."

Blake was still busy with his correspondence when Marcia was ready to join the crowd of bathers. "Will you be here when I come back?" she asked, brushing back his hair and kissing his forehead.

"I'll wait for you."

At the door she turned to look back at him. To think that a big, brainy man like him was devoting his time and efforts to making a home for her. Of course, he was just now giving his undivided attention to his letters, but that was also for her, indirectly. Ultimately everything he did was for her.

Blake picked up a letter with a Washington postmark. He opened it nervously; it was from Lyman Curtis. He looked up to tell Marcia about it, but she was gone.

"He's coming to Waverly to see me about something very important!" he soliloquized, when he had finished reading the letter. And, looking again at the blurred signature, to satisfy himself that he was not mistaken, he added, "I can't imagine what he wants to see me about—how it could be important enough to bring him all the way from Washington to see me!"

He put the letter away with the others and went out to sit on the veranda; still puzzling, he dropped into a chair, idly watching the bathers. Marcia was that instant poised on the spring-board, her hands raised above her head, ready to plunge into the water. Even at this distance one was aware of her exquisite grace and the beautifully molded proportions of her body.

"Marcia, you fascinating woman," he thought ecstatically, hugging the thought that she was his very own to himself. "You make life interesting."

She disappeared. He was vainly attempting to catch sight of her again, when his attention was attracted by a dozen or more people alighting from the motor-bus *The Rockcliff* maintained on the two-mile run between the depot and the hotel. He thought he recognized one of them, a certain man who was standing apart from his fellow passengers with an air of indifference.

"It's Lyman Curtis, as sure as I live," he said, getting up.

He raced down the steps. Curtis was giving orders to a porter about his baggage when he came down. Washington had as yet not changed him in the least; he was the same Lyman Curtis, profuse as ever in expressing his delight at seeing Blake.

"I want to talk to you—privately—at once," he told the doctor. "Have you got time?"

"Yes. Come up to the room."

"Is Marcia there?"

"No," said Blake, looking in the direction of the bathers. "She's in the water. It'll be some time before she'll come in."

They started upstairs. Blake was extremely curious to hear what the man had to say, and was hoping they would not be disturbed until he learned the purport of Curtis' visit.

"I need your help," said Curtis, without preamble, the moment the door had closed upon them.

"My help?" echoed Blake.

"Yes."

Blake waited for the other to explain, but Curtis was hesitant. "God, Blake, I'm ashamed to tell you. You'll think I'm a cur."

Blake urged him to haste. "Hurry up and tell me what you've got to say. Marcia may come in any moment."

"You see—" Curtis paused, as if at a loss to know how to proceed. "That is, I—I want your advice. . . . And probably your help."

"Well?"

Curtis handed him a letter. "Read that," he demanded. "I believe that'll explain the whole of it."

Blake took the letter and read it—twice. It was not of recent date and it was simply signed 'Phyllis.' A hot anger siezed the doctor, making it difficult for him to restrain himself from killing the man who sat before him. Then he recalled what Phyllis had hold him. The matter was as completely settled as it could ever be. The taking of a life could only complicate it.

"Did Phyllis Girard write this letter?" he demanded.

"Yes. . . . Do you know her?"

"At present she is one of my patients at the hospital in Waverly."

"Is she getting along all right?" asked Curtis, knowingly. "Of course, I know she couldn't be doing otherwise, under your care."

Blake knew him too well to take offense at the intimation. "She is—now."

"Was she very a—a—ill?"

"She was after she took the poison."

"Poison! Did she take poison?"

"What else would you expect a distracted girl to do?" asked Blake sternly. "If she had died you would have been her murderer!"

"I realize that," admitted Curtis, cringing.

The situation was becoming even more complicated than he had anticipated. He began asking the doctor questions, some of which time only could answer.

"There is only one honorable thing for you to do," said Blake sternly.

"I know what you're thinking about, but marriage is out of the question. . . . That was thoroughly gone into when we realized how things stood. You know I'm not a bad sort, and I'm willing to do what is right. I wanted to marry her when she wrote that letter, but wanting to do a thing does not always do it. I guess it was too late. I went to Williston purposely—secretly—at that time to do what I could, but she was gone. Blake, if you only knew! I've been half insane for days. We instinctively go to the friend we think the most of when we're in trouble. And I've come to you."

Blake was inclined to doubt Curtis' sincerity. He believed the man had come to him largely to help himself—that he was trying to save himself from becoming further involved in a distasteful affair.

"I've arranged to take care of Miss Girard," he answered Curtis tersely. "She will live in one of my houses in Waverly. I'm having it put in repair while I'm away, and I've arranged for a colored woman to live with her—

to keep house for her. Whatever you can throw in the hat will be appreciated."

The first of the bathers were now coming in. They could see Marcia crossing the road between the strand and the hotel, her left foot wheeling inward at each step in a walk characteristic of herself alone.

"Someday I'll have a chance to repay you," Curtis hastened to assure Blake. "I'll never forget. I'll do my share, financially, to take care of Phyllis. You'll hear from me soon in regard to that."

"What I did for her was done without a thought of reimbursement. Under the same circumstances, I suppose I would have done the same thing even for an enemy."

"Then it wasn't for me that you undertook to care for her?"

"No, it was not. I'm unable to say what prompted me to do it."

"I am indebted to you, nevertheless," insisted Curtis. "You fulfilled at least part of my obligation toward her."

Blake was still skeptical of Curtis' sincerity when Marcia came through the doorway, interrupting further discussion.

* * * * *

But Curtis had a deeper regard for Phyllis than Blake gave him credit for. His conscience in regard to her had caused him genuine distress, badly fraying his nerves. The constant turning over in his mind of the abominable situation was driving him to distraction. It was true, his anxiety was not all for Phyllis' plight, but he was far from considering only his own welfare, though he could see a thousand different endings to the situation, each of which involved him seriously. He was paying for his violation with a remorse so great that life seemed anything but worth living. He could not eat; he could not sleep; he could not rest. There was not a single phase of the affair for which he could not raise up a multitude of defenses. But his concern for Phyllis' further well-being was quite genuine.

"Who is the colored woman you have arranged with to take care of Phyllis?" he asked Blake when they next talked about her.

"Her name is Gracie Grace. You probably know her—she was here last year."

"Is she the one who did the chamber work on our floor?"

"That's her."

He went to see Gracie, and found her alone.

"Come in, Mister Curtis," she called when he knocked, having recognized him as he passed her window. "Come right in. Ise not conditioned to come to de door."

He went in. "You've been quite sick, I hear, Gracie."

"Yes. . . . Dropped in de water an' I catches a bad cold. Who tol' you about it?"

"Doctor Blake told me. He said he had been treating you."

"Say, now, ain't he de bestest man you ever saw in all your whole life?"

"Without a question. . . . But there's something else I came to see you about. Doctor Blake told me you were going to Waverly to keep house for Phyllis Girard."

"Phyllis Girard?" the colored woman echoed.

"That's what he said."

"You mus' have misunderstood him. Mrs. Margaret Jones is de one who Ise gwine to work for."

"I tell you her name is Phyllis Girard!"

"U-u-u-u-u-m," grunted Gracie, not understanding. "That sounds funny to me."

"Well, it's really unimportant to you who she is. You'll receive your pay and nothing else should interest you. That is why I'm here." He took a notebook from his pocket and handed her several pieces of currency. "Take this," he said. "You'll receive more each month from Doctor Blake. . . . Don't tell Phyllis about getting this money from me. Take good care of her, Gracie. . . . You'll soon know why I'm asking that of you."

"I proposes to go about my business an' to keep my mouf shut."

Curtis forced a short, nervous laugh. "You'll do your part fine, Gracie," he assured her. "I know that. And remember, the better you do it the more—well, you know."

"Course I knows, Mister Curtis. Wasn't you the mos'

generest person on my floor in that there hotel last year? Maybe I don' remember that!"

"But don't remember my name when you talk to either Phyllis or Doctor Blake."

"Don't you worry about that. . . . Ise gwine to forget all 'sinuations."

Curtis forced a sickly smile, and left.

* * * * *

The presence of Lyman Curtis greatly stimulated Marcia's vivacity during the remaining days of her summer holiday. Her gaiety and attractiveness greatly increased, which, when Blake observed it, made him jealously uneasy. He could not persuade himself that he had completely supplanted Curtis in Marcia's affections. The fact of marriage does not in itself eradicate all former attractions, even though on the surface it would seem to do so. There was also no doubt that Lyman Curtis still loved Marcia. The inhibitory center in the brain is not always strong enough to force the cravings of the body to conform to reason. Love cannot be placed, nor can it be recalled, once it has found its wings.

Although Marcia was fond of associating with people, she had never, since the day of her marriage with Blake, turned her back deliberately upon him to seek diversion elsewhere. Whenever they were apart it was by his arrangement or because of his business, and to such separations she never offered objection or made complaint, other than an occasional wifely admonition about applying himself too closely to his work and injuring his health. It was impossible for a wife to be more sincerely devoted to her husband than Marcia was to Blake; still, she entertained an innocent admiration and liking for Curtis.

Several times Blake had difficulty controlling a strong impulse of anger when he observed that Curtis was practically monopolizing his wife. But for consolation he would fall back upon the thought that had come to him so suddenly the morning Jacques Dumont brought his son to him for a consultation: that time was the solution of all problems. Marcia's friendship for Curtis had been too close a bond to be broken lightly. Ultimately Curtis would, by degrees, fill that treacherous vacancy in his life

created by Marcia's marriage with other interests and other hopes. The doctor credited Marcia with knowing her mind as well as he knew his.

* * * * *

Judge Day and Governor Goodrich were getting uneasy about Folsom's attitude. He had not fulfilled his promise to give them an outline of the method he intended to employ in securing the women's votes in his district. They had sketched plans of their own to be applied in other districts, but they had decided that Folsom, in order to be kept in line, must be given a free hand where he wanted it. They were anxious to know what progress he had made, for it was unthinkable that he had not been working. But they had learned to fear him, and refrained from pressing him unnecessarily. However, since he was laying plans for a fishing trip, and was to return to Waverly immediately thereafter, they took the matter under advisement and concluded to ask him. Together they set out to find him. They encountered him on the strand in front of *The Rockcliff*, talking to Marcia. He invited them to find seats.

"Right here is the spring that can release all the difficulties up in our country," he advised them. "She can turn the trick as easy as that." And he twitched his walking-stick significantly. "She's a convincing girl."

Marcia smiled, her eyes glowing with pleasure. She liked people who held responsible positions, and had always felt that she would like to mingle with them.

"Well," speculated Goodrich, "what's to keep us from going right ahead?"

"It's her. . . . She doesn't want to go into it."

Goodrich frowned. "Of course, we'll have to keep in mind that this thing is something entirely new to Mrs. Blake." He looked at her as if he was not so certain about that. "Isn't it?" he asked.

Marcia indicated it was. She wished she could have denied it.

Goodrich moved familiarly close to her on the bench. "I think she needs a little coaxing—women always do."

Folsom registered despair. "I've worked like a Trojan for a week trying to persuade her to come in with us."

In her slight confusion, Marcia was very pretty. She was content to listen, with an inexplicable thrill, while these case-hardened politicians talked. They were big men in her native state.

Judge Day, who had remained silent until now, offered, "Mrs. Blake could handle the entire feminine side of our campaign. The furore she created at the meeting of the State Federation of Women's Clubs last winter has given her an invaluable state-wide reputation as a leader."

"A woman's club won't stand comparison with politics," Goodrich reminded him pompously.

Folsom turned on him fiercely. "That very attitude has placed you in the position you are now asking me to extricate you from! Don't forget that primarily it was club meetings that gave women the courage to go in for suffrage, and that's the channel through which we must gain their support—if we ever hope to have it. Mrs. Blake has made a name for herself in this state. No one is in a better position to handle the situation than she."

"That was the point I was coming to," interrupted Day. "We would heartily welcome her support."

Goodrich stuck to his guns. "I shall be only too glad to accept her aid, but don't confuse ladies' club meetings with politics!"

"Who is confusing things?" demanded Folsom. "Who is doing that?"

Marcia thought it was time to make her position clear in the matter. "I don't want to go into politics," she objected. "My place is in my home. My time belongs to my husband."

Folsom was not certain that he could control his anger, not over what Marcia had said, for she had defined her attitude to him before, but over the way his political colleague—Goodrich—was conducting himself.

"Mrs. Blake has informed me that she needs time to think the matter over," he said, winking slyly at the others, indicating he desired to confer further with her alone. "Did you see Ramsdell, Judge Day?"

"I did not," was the reply. "We were looking for him when we came across you."

The two men excused themselves and left.

* * * * *

Sometimes even a high position, obtained through no merit whatever on the part of its incumbent, may become insignificant because of the one who occupies it. It was in such a light that Marcia regarded Day and Goodrich. She knew that Folsom's ideas coincided very closely with her own, only he was making a brave attempt to support these men for the sake of the value of their success to him. She was shrewd enough to understand that these two men were mere figureheads, ruled by Folsom and other men like him, who had no definite intention to commit serious offenses, but who would not stop to split ethical hairs in the accomplishment of their ends.

"I will never go into politics," she vowed. "Those two men have given me my fill."

Folsom always had an answer ready—if he wanted to.

"What you saw a moment ago is the greatest reason in the world why you should do what you can to mend matters," he drove home the best argument he had yet advanced. "Who is going to stamp out the corruption we're constantly fighting if it isn't done by someone who has sufficient insight to see through the situation—as you do?"

Marcia thought seriously. "I can't decide now," she told him after a moment. "I must have more time to think. And the way I feel now, my decision will be not to enter politics." Her gaze traveled from the water to the hotel. "I believe Don is waiting for me. Let's go up."

On the way to the hotel they encountered Goodrich seated on a bench.

"I'll see you at the capital within a week," Folsom said to him as they passed.

Chapter V

Immediately on arriving home, Blake resumed his medical and surgical practice with a vigor that surpassed all his former endeavors. The only other surgeon in the town had operated on one of his patients during his absence, under the pretense that the man's condition was so critical that immediate, drastic means were necessary. This fired Blake's ambition to a fever heat; he cast aside the cock-sure attitude he had assumed since the Dumonts had consulted him, and became again the hustler of old.

For the time being he also forgot that he had assumed the responsibility of Phyllis Girard, thinking of her only as one of the many hospital patients under his care. It was not until a week later, when Gracie came to his office to inform him that she was ready to take up the duties of the position he had offered her, that he remembered his obligation to Phyllis.

"Sit down," he invited Gracie. "I suppose you're still a little weak?"

"I'se not weak no more," she assured him, fearing he might suggest she should defer resuming work if she admitted feeling unfit. "I'se just dyin' to do somethin'!"

"Well, I'm not going to let you die on that account."

He wheeled around in his chair and called up Woods Booth, the contractor with whom he had arranged the repair of the house Phyllis and Gracie were to occupy. He was told that the place was ready for occupancy.

"Mrs. Jones is still in the hospital," he told the colored woman, turning from the telephone, "but she's in shape to leave anytime. I'll take you out there so you can look the place over and get it in shape to move in."

"That's good. I wants to get busy."

Blake was not inclined to cast suspicion on himself by purchasing the necessary furniture for the house, so he decided to give Gracie the money and have her do the buying, paying cash as she bought. He busied himself

jotting down items and prices, trying to arrive at some estimate regarding the amount of money such a transaction would require. Then, when he had checked over the list and added up the rows of figures, he secured a ponderous check book from his desk and drew a check for three hundred dollars, taking it to the office attendant and asking her to have it cashed and bring him the money.

"Do you know anything about buying furnishings for a house, Gracie?" he asked when he came back.

"I sure does," she declared. "I bought mos' all the things for our house when Amber Grace an' me was married—the little we did get."

Blake smiled. "Here, look these figures over," he said. "They show that three hundred dollars will buy enough for you and Mrs. Jones to get along with."

Gracie did not even stop to consider. "That sure will be sufficientness—of which I know." In all seriousness she added, "I 'pose Mrs. Jones am better now?"

Blake studied the black face and knowing eyes. Her emphasis on the "Mrs. Jones" had betrayed her. It convinced him that she knew more than he had told her of Phyllis' identity, though he did not question her about it. He said instead, "She is still a little nervous, but much better."

Gracie settled back in her chair, her mind toying with visions of what she could do with three hundred dollars. Her day dreaming was interrupted by the girl coming in with the money.

"There you are," said Blake, handing the money to Gracie. "If you don't need all of it to buy furnishings you may use what is left for provisions."

"What I won't spend for furnishin's an' stuff will buy providin's for us two for mos' six months," she assured him. "I'se the most economist person you ever saw. Just you watch what I can do, Doctor Blake."

"I knew you had ability along that line," he complimented her. "That's why I wanted you for this work."

* * * * *

Because his mind was concentrated so exclusively on his medical practice at the time when Gracie called, Blake had made a random notation on a piece of paper,—a

reminder to arrange with Phyllis to have her moved to the house he had prepared for her. He placed the slip in his coat pocket. But, in his anxiety to regain what he had lost during his stay at Lashaway, he promptly forgot about Phyllis and when he changed his clothes the following morning the note was left where he had put it the evening before.

Marcia always followed in her husband's wake, picking up clothes, underwear, collars, and any other wearing apparel he had changed. Her routine included a search of his pockets before sending the clothes to the laundry or cleaner. That morning, among other things, she came across a small piece of folded paper. Curious though she was to discover if there was anything written on it, she placed it on his dresser, together with a pencil and a penknife she had found in the same pocket, resisting a strong desire to unfold it. She continued with her work, trying to forget the little folded paper, but several times she found herself returning to the dresser. She found plenty to do arranging his effects, most of which were presents from her. Then, as if suddenly awakened, she became aware that the little piece of folded paper was beckoning to her. The lure was so persistent that at last she made herself feel justified in ascertaining whether it bore some message. It was much more likely that it was quite inconsequential, and Blake would consider it foolish if she saved it as if it were a thing of value. Finally, she picked up the innocent-looking little slip, and then found that she could not resist going further.

"I'll see if there is anything written on it," she salved her conscience. "But I'll not read it if there is." Her nimble fingers quickly unfolded the professional powder-paper tuck-in. "I wouldn't do this if it were a sealed letter," she declared to herself, "but I'm not going to read it, anyway. Just want to see if it has writing on it that is worth saving. An accumulation of worthless things makes rubbish."

There was writing on it—Blake's hand. In the twinkling of an eye she had read it; an uncontrollable impulse had driven her to do it. "Remember to move Phyllis Girard to house." There was nothing unusual about it;

apparently a purely business matter. Perhaps an order for someone. She felt guilty as she endeavored to return it to its former appearance, in which, after many attempts, she failed miserably. Then she studied the wording leisurely; the most important thing about the whole note seemed to be the way it was folded when she found it. It had seemed so entirely inconsequential—and yet, there it was! The obscurity of its message made her angry with herself. Why had she allowed herself to meddle? Still, the name Phyllis Girard was too familiar to her not to attach some importance to it—just the name. It was interesting to think she might be her husband's patient. Could it be possible that she was one of the Williston Girards? She knew of no one by that name living in Waverly.

Continuing with her house duties, she still paused to puzzle over it. Her failure to arrive at a satisfactory explanation made her uneasy. Her work no longer held her attention, yet her mind was too active to let her body rest. Driven by an impulse she could not explain, she telephoned to Folsom and definitely accepted the political itinerary he had outlined for her. The little note had settled that much, at least,—she was now a politician.

* * * * *

When Blake came home at noon he looked bored and disgruntled. Things were not *breaking* right and to such a situation he always responded with an irritable temper, resulting in fatigue. Marcia had ceased to sympathize with him on these occasions, understanding him well enough now to know that remarks from her only added fuel to the fire. To appear as if everything was usual was the way to handle him when he was moody.

"I'm going to Webster this afternoon," he said as he came in. "Do you want to go along? If you do, let's hurry."

His offer to take her along was a little extraordinary, for he had elected for some time to make his drives without her. Probably he was asking her to go because her uncle lived at Webster. The thought of Phyllis Girard flashed through her mind. In a spirit of pique quite un-

usual to her, she pretended to be busy at her writing-desk, giving it her undivided attention.

"Can you wait a little while? I'd like to finish with this."

He came over to where she was. "I'll wait all my life for you."

She looked dubious. "All your life?" she inquired coolly. "Really?" But at the same time she realized that she had mistaken the effect of professional pressure on him for moodiness. He followed her into the kitchen, throwing off the weight of depression while he helped her.

"Let's have our supper downtown tonight and go to the Country Club dance afterward," he suggested when there was nothing left for him to do. "You work so hard and go out so little lately."

She laughed. There was mischief in her eyes as she replied, "That imputation is in conflict with my reputation. Someone was heard to remark that Mrs. Folsom and I 'gad'."

"Who said that?"

"I don't remember."

"That's all wrong. The way you keep this house, and the garden, too, shows where you're spending your time."

"Don't you worry about me," she said, using his own formula. "I have a splendid constitution. I need the exercise. I don't want to become muscle-bound."

But he was insistent. "Well, you know what I mean. Get out more. It will let them know we're still alive. You've got several dresses I've never even seen you wear."

"Do the wives of other doctors go about more than I do?" she asked curiously.

"They mix more."

"Mix more?"

"Yes. They're out boosting their husbands."

At last the purport of his insistence became clear to her; he was actually soliciting her support. She hurried with her work and joined him.

"So that is what you think the wife of a doctor ought to do?" she asked.

"Well," he began to explain, "it isn't necessary to make

a business of it like some do. I mean, you should get out more."

"I think I will."

She almost told him about her promise to Folsom, but a lack of confidence in her ability made her hesitate. The first steps, which were certain to create consternation among her friends, were the most difficult.

Blake was fussing about with his cigar, preparatory to lighting it. He seemed to have forgotten the haste he was in when he came home. Suddenly he asked, "Did you send my clothes to the cleaners this morning?"

"Yes."

"I left some things in the pockets. Did you find them?"

He had thought of the memorandum and remembered that he had left it in his clothes when he had spoken to Phyllis that morning.

Marcia got up. "I'll bring them."

He fumbled awkwardly as he tucked the various articles away, the smoke from the cigar creeping annoyingly into his eyes. He stood up, saying, "I'll have to run down to the office before going to Webster."

She noticed that he was purposely careless about the note, dropping it on the floor as he went out.

"How soon will you come back for me?" she asked, following him to the door.

"In about an hour."

* * * * *

Folsom, shrewd manipulator that he was, lost no time making Marcia 'solid' for politics, so he arranged to have a personal talk with her as soon as he could conveniently get away after she telephoned to him. Fate allotted him the hour that Blake must spend at his office before going to Webster. He was not altogether sure of his ground. Marcia's previous indecision—feminine fickleness, he called it—had taught him not to take too much for granted. And a political transaction over the telephone was not as binding as he desired to make it. Whenever he worked on subjects he wanted to be where he could study the effect he was having on them.

He opened the interview in a note of familiar confidence. "Marcia, you've done me a great favor, perhaps

I should say honor." With this he hoped to hold her to what she had promised. "But I tell you, the issue is worthy of your support, though if it were not I would still ask you to lend your name for my own sake. Your help is going to mean much to me, and who knows what I can do in return? You are proving yourself to be the good fellow I thought you were."

He paused to determine the effectiveness of his words.

Marcia laughed, her blue eyes flashing. "You're all wrong, Mr. Folsom," she declared.

"I'm wrong? I wonder if I am wrong?" he mused. He turned to face her. "Why do you say that?"

"I have a mind of my own," she explained.

"You mean—"

"That you haven't talked me into this."

He felt as if someone struck him in the face. "Anyway, you're going to stick?"

"Of course."

"That's the girl. Get into the fight. Primarily, that's the purpose in life; a worth-while person wants to be where the fray is the thickest. I'm not in it because I must be, but for the satisfaction that a hard-fought and just victory gives me. And some day I'm going to win—completely. You're probably aware of the existing discord between myself and my colleagues. There'll be only accord when I'm through. I want the assistance of people like you, whom I can trust, who are not afraid to assert themselves when they know house-cleaning is an imperative necessity. I'll be in cahoots with my present associates as long as I haven't the upper hand. You know, at times it is necessary to tolerate inferior people and their tactics to gain a point. That is what I'm doing."

Marcia was waiting for him to finish. "Since it's decided that I'm going in," she said, "just what do you want me to do?"

"Are you willing to go on the speaking tour I proposed some time ago?"

"How long will it take?"

Folsom considered a moment. "About two weeks."

"I'll go," she agreed.

The quality of her voice left no doubt in his mind that he had won another victory. Such a thing as actually instituting reforms, if he ultimately gained the control he hoped for, had not even entered his mind. Despite what she had told him, he thought that he had beguiled her into politics with his cleverness, when, in fact, it was the note she had found in Blake's pocket that had swung the scales.

* * * * *

Blake had not returned when Folsom was ready to leave, so Marcia went downtown with him. Recovered from her petulance of the morning, she felt a little uneasy and remorseful over what she had done. But she found some justification for her action in the thought that Blake was too reticent in the expression of his opinions, leaving her almost wholly unaware of his likes and dislikes. At times she wished her husband was more outspoken and firm when she was seized with a desire or a whim she knew to be preposterous, for she lacked the self-control to regulate her impulses without help.

When Marcia reached Blake's office he was still busy, though there was no one waiting to see him. She sat down, preferring not to disturb him. At last she heard him discharging the patient through the side door, and a moment later he appeared in the waiting-room with his hat, presumably ready to start for Webster. He greeted her with a surprised, "Hello!"

She smiled and nodded. "Are you ready to go now?"

"Yes. I'm sorry I kept you waiting so long."

"I didn't mind it," she assured him.

"Well, let's go."

"I'd like to speak to you before we start," she said, as if she might be afraid he would refuse to take her further if she told him on the way.

"All right," he said, retracing his steps to his private room. "Come in here."

She got up and followed him.

"I did something awful, Don," she said when they were inside. "It seems there's always something happening."

His jaw dropped, his brows knitted, his brain enter-

tained a thousand dread possibilities. "What did you do?"

"I promised Mr. Folsom to go on a political speaking tour."

"Damn!"

He was at once sorry he had said it, for he had given her numerous occasions to say the same thing.

"You don't want me to do it?" she asked, child-like.

"I don't."

"Then I won't."

"But if you have promised, dear," he said, "I think you should make good your promise."

It pleased her to find him giving in so easily. She had prepared a strong defense for a strenuous objection. She said, "I think so, too."

The electric buzzer called him to the telephone. "Y-e-e-e-s-s, Worth," he said in a choked voice, "I'll come right over." He hooked up the receiver and turned to Marcia. "I'm wanted at the hospital," he told her. "You might ride over with me."

At the hospital he was relieved to find the situation less serious than he had anticipated. Doctor Worth had summoned him when Phyllis, who had sufficiently convalesced to walk about the institution, showed symptoms of a relapse. What Worth thought was a threatened recurrence of the stomach ecchymosis, was only a pallor induced by nervousness and fatigue. Blake had explained his plans for her future to her that morning, and with her brain sufficiently cleared to think consecutively, she felt the sting of her predicament more keenly than ever before. But she had said very little at the time, preferring to suffer in silence the humiliation of accepting charity from him, which she knew she must eventually accept from someone. The pent-up pain of body and mind she had endured the past month, the renewal of it that morning, had combined to drive her to the point of madness.

"You must get out of this place at once," Blake advised her. "This environment is constantly reminding you of things you should be forgetting. The house I've prepared for you is ready, and I'll provide Gracie with enough money to tide you over until you are able to

work. Out there you will have different surroundings and you will feel better. I know you and Gracie will get along splendidly. I want you to go out there tomorrow."

Phyllis dared not look at him. Unable to control her emotions, she began to sob. She made several attempts to say something appropriate in acknowledgment of his goodness, but none of her thoughts would form themselves into words.

He was waiting rather impatiently for her reply, and when she seemed unable to decide, he made the decision for her. "I'll tell Gracie you're coming—tomorrow."

She turned to him appealingly. "Oh, thank you," she faltered. "I thank you, so much."

* * * * *

Folsom had left that same day for the capitol to consult with Governor Goodrich, to tell him, among other things, just what arrangements he had made with Marcia.

"I'd like to know how you got started with that woman!" roared the governor. "I have reasons to believe that she's against me."

"Who told you that?"

"Well, I'm not asleep!"

"You're just imagining!" suggested the other.

"Perhaps my confidence is shaken because I'm worried."

"Let me assure you that I have her under control."

Goodrich thought an instant before he spoke again. "Now then," he said, "presuming she was for me, how would we be utilizing her, anyway? I understand she hasn't any 'stumping' experience."

"And still you think she's liable to hurt you," retorted Folsom. "Who figured this for you?"

"I did!"

"Just like you did Gleason, I suppose?"

"There's something peculiar about that, Tom. Jim was waiting for me with his resignation when I came back from Lashaway. I've been wondering if Judge Day had a conference with him. You know, he came home before I did, but he was called to Washington before I had a chance to see him."

"You recall what I said about him being in disrepute?" Folsom suggested.

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, he's been bought."

"Anyway, I'm glad we're rid of him."

"Now then," went on Folsom, "coming back to Mrs. Blake, irrespective of what you've heard about her being against you, we need her help up in our county."

"I haven't the least confidence in her."

"I have—lots of it."

Goodrich stirred uneasily in his chair. "I don't want her support!"

Folsom shifted impatiently. "Goodrich," he said, "I hope you are aware by this time that I can put you out of this office or keep you in it!"

Goodrich was in a quandary. He was trying to decide whether to free himself from Folsom's domination now or to continue to tolerate him until after election. He decided on the latter course. He further concluded that it was advisable to adhere to his old policy, giving Folsom an opportunity to entangle himself in his own machinations, which had so far defeated all insurgents of the Folsom type. He would give him time, which was sure to bring out something tangible to work on.

"You're right, Tom," he said. "I owe you a great deal. You are in a position to know exactly what to do up there. If you didn't, who would? Go home and do as well as you have in the past. . . . That'll satisfy me."

Folsom pulled himself out of his chair. He was leaning heavily on his cane as he limped over to extend his hand to the governor.

"Rest assured that you'll go over big in my community," he said. "Goodrich, you're going to be re-elected. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

As soon as Folsom had left, Goodrich summoned Harry Willets, his chief lieutenant, national committeeman and real governor of the state, to his aid. He had accepted Marcia's services because Folsom demanded it, but he wanted Willets to corroborate his opinion of her worth. It was possible that he was mistaken.

"Who is this Marcia Blake?" demanded Willets. "I'm sure I have never heard of her before."

"She's quite a dabbler in women's affairs," Goodrich offered.

"Well, women have gone into politics. I hope we're not waking up to it too late."

"It's possible that we've been napping."

"Well, most women are new at the business," said Willets, apparently finding comfort in the thought. "I know I have never heard of Marcia Blake before in connection with politics. It's seldom that an upstart causes much stir. So don't let that worry you."

In spite of his words, Willets never considered anything of this kind lightly. He was a serious man and everything connected with his business was regarded seriously. But he had never been able to convince himself that feminine ability was on a plane with that of men, so he was not much concerned over what "this Marcia Blake" might accomplish. Women were attractive creatures, and occasionally men 'fell' for them, but since *he* had never fallen he did not appreciate the effect their scheming might have.

Ill-considered opinions frequently lead to prejudices, and Willets, who had always been capable of handling what his judgment recommended, put himself rather deliberately into the hands of his prejudices rather than grow sentimental. Because of this his pursuit of women had no other goal than the pleasure he derived from studying human peculiarities. He tolerated women amiably because it was easier to tolerate than to take issue with them, forgetting, in the meanwhile, that there was a possible serious flaw in his initial line of reasoning.

"Folsom is grooming her for a campaign tour up in his part of the country," Goodrich continued after a while. "He was just in to tell me about it. I have no real objection to her, except that she may turn out to be a maverick if she should happen to make good. In that case, it's possible that she may develop into a formidable foe. The whole thing is this,—I don't know her well enough to trust her."

Willets nodded his head. "So Folsom has concocted something again."

"He's becoming more and more difficult," continued the governor. I'll admit, though reluctantly, I'm beginning to fear him. He is deliberately trying to make himself obnoxious to me. What do you suppose his motive is?"

"To make a display of his power," replied Willets. "Then, too, he's maneuvering for a position to play a big game."

"I think you ought to go up and look things over."

"I'll do that," agreed Willets. "I've got to do it."

And they proceeded to discuss plans that took Willets to Waverly the following day.

* * * * *

In Waverly a surprise awaited Willets. On his way he had formed a mental picture of Marcia Blake. He had mulled over the schemes he proposed to employ in dealing with her on his arrival in Waverly, for someone else had been selected to do the work Folsom had outlined for her. He visualized her as a scrawny, hard-faced, hard-voiced woman, seeking notoriety in this way because she did not recognize her own limitations.

He was utterly dumfounded when he actually saw Marcia. To think of putting his well-laid plans into execution was now absurd. She was too womanly to be made an object of ridicule; he could see far more reason for a reversal of Goodrich's suggestion, thus having her on their side. He admired Folsom for the first time in his life for having sensed the value of making a colleague of her. There was not the least doubt in his mind that she would make a pleasant associate, though he was extremely doubtful whether her mild personality was the kind that would convince the voter. For, in spite of his intense personal admiration for her, Willets was quite certain that Marcia would be a failure in the political field if left alone.

Although only a little past thirty, Willets was a man of the soundest judgment, and he was held in the highest esteem by members of his party, even by such men as the reactionary Folsom. Because he was known to be a deep thinker, a man who sternly adhered to his convictions, he

had been party-leader in his state for a number of years. He had come to Waverly under the guise of friendship, to prepare an itinerary for Marcia that would work out to her disadvantage. Besides this, he was to help her draft speeches that would appear flawless to a political novice, but that were wide open for the severest and most disconcerting criticism from men such as he proposed to have follow in her wake. He had come to involve her in intrigue and cut short her aspirations as well as those of Folsom; but this bachelor, who had never found any woman interesting enough to make him even think of marriage, found everything in Marcia he had vainly sought in women all through life. It was easy for him to understand now why a man stops when he finds the right woman and lets the rest of the world go by.

In discussing various phases of the situation, Marcia was pleased to know that Willets was a friend of Governor Goodrich.

"He is such an impressive gentleman," she said. Then, thinking of the way Folsom had bent him to his will at Lashaway, she added, "Still, when you know him, he seems almost too mild for a public man."

Willets agreed with her. "Goodrich is too temperate for his own good," he said, drawing strongly on his imagination in an effort to see his colleague the way Marcia was picturing him. "He allows the minds of other people to dominate him," he added. "At times he permits this to reach the point of danger in order to avoid strife."

"Why does he place himself at the mercy of an ungrateful public?" Marcia wondered.

"Ungrateful public?"

"Yes. . . . To be chosen or rejected by people who, many of them, really don't know why they are casting a ballot?"

He replied with another question. "Why do you aspire to identically the same thing?"

Marcia did not like his audacity. "Because it is necessary!" she said severely. "Just *that* is the reason! I'm volunteering my services in a cause that had its inception many years ago, and in which so little progress has been made that woman's ability is open to question. I'm trying

to act as a stimulus—if that is possible. I know most men are alarmed at the wild things they think women will do, but you'll find that our judgment isn't so bad. I'm quite sure women will not be the sort of politicians who'll grant favors because one hand is taking tainted money while the other is signing away the freedom of a fellow citizen."

Willets smiled. "You seem to think all men are—"

"I do not," she interrupted him. "That accusation does not include everybody—because they haven't all been investigated."

He smiled again, thinking how utterly mistaken he had been when he thought he was going to Waverly to deal with a novice. Because he enjoyed listening to her, he asked, "Are you anxious to hold an office?"

"I am not," was her simple reply.

"You'll be glad when your opportunity comes to do it."

"If I ever find it necessary to hold an office," she said, "I'll try to conduct myself in such a manner that I won't have to be investigated."

For a time there was silence. Willets, presuming that he was dealing with a woman of temperament, decided that he must choose his words carefully if he was to gain her confidence, for he was now fully determined to make her his ally instead of a scapegoat.

At length she broke the silence. "Tell me just why you are here, Mr. Willets."

"Let us be reasonable about this matter," he began. "Don't judge me until I've given you the details. I came here to deceive you, but I won't. Thomas Folsom was at the capital yesterday and conferred with Governor Goodrich. He indicated he was using you as a stepping-stone, to which Goodrich had no objection as far as you are concerned, but Folsom's attitude worried him. So he called on me and we consulted over the matter. We finally decided on my trip up here. I was to employ every means at my command, if they were all necessary, to lure you into a political trap and then hold you up to ridicule. In that way we proposed to knock down one of the props on which Folsom was resting his laurels." Willets unbuckled a portfolio and took from it a sheaf of typewritten

sheets. "Here is how the cards were stacked against you," he continued. "You were to make speeches that are out of harmony with party-policy. You were to go on a speaking tour that would have conflicted with other programs, which would have placed you at a serious disadvantage. It was our intention to send two men here, one to precede and one to trail you, as if representing the opposition, to stir up agitation against you and against everything you said. But your womanliness made me reconsider the instant I saw you. In repentance I shall spare no effort to make you successful. But, first of all, I want to appeal to you, honestly and honorably, to remain out of politics. Once you begin you're in it for good. A political life is no life for a woman like you."

Marcia looked at him calmly. "I believe you are sincere, Mr. Willets," she said. "But why are you?"

"I don't know," he replied with a puzzled smile. "The many inexplicable things in it makes the world interesting." Then he turned serious again, adding, "What is your decision—now? Are you still determined to enter politics?"

"Why, certainly! I intend to proceed without altering a single plan I've made."

"Then count on my help."

She could think of no reason why she should reject his offer. "I'll be glad to have it," she accepted.

* * * * *

Several days later Folsom, full of fight, returned to Waverly. On the way home he was informed that Willets had been in town during his absence to consult with Marcia, which he considered the greatest misconduct on the part of a political colleague, especially since Goodrich had agreed not to interfere with him in his allotted territory. He went to see Marcia; he was severe when he pointed out her mistake.

"In this you're responsible to me!" he warned her. "To me and to no one else! Be sure you understand that!"

If she had not regarded him as a friend she might have resented his advice vigorously. But she was determined not to make enemies through her new venture, and she

said placatingly, "Please, Mr. Folsom, I wish you to understand that I'm still mistress of my own convictions."

"I—I mean," he stammered, "I'd like to know where I stand."

"Don't you think it would have been better if you had found that out before becoming so dictatorial?"

"I did not mean to dictate, Marcia, though I may have given you that impression. I want to know how we stand. To whom are you going to account, Willets or myself?"

Marcia felt that she was about to say something that would bring her friendship with the Folsoms to a sudden termination, and she had learned to care enough about these people to make her hesitate before she replied. Down deep in her heart she wished she had never heard the word 'politics,' and she silently vowed that her affiliation with it would immediately and forever end with the Fall election.

"I'm not taking orders from anyone," she said very slowly at last. "I shall always welcome advice and suggestions from you, but my own judgment will guide me."

"Well, we'll see."

Chapter VI

Summer was on the wane. The days were growing perceptibly shorter, and although still uncomfortably hot, people were by instinct preparing for the Autumn. Only the stragglers had not yet returned from their Summer holiday. Great flocks of birds were gathering for their southward migration, and the farms in the vicinity of Waverly were shorn of their crops.

It was on one of these hot, late Summer days that Blake was driving through the country many miles from Waverly, not on a professional call, as one might suppose, but because he felt the necessity for new, changed scenes. The very thought of home and the town in which he lived had become distasteful to him, because Marcia was now away almost constantly, campaigning with all the ingenuity that her limited experience would permit.

"I could forgive you for getting her into this," Blake had told Folsom, "if the poor girl knew how to defend herself against a pack of jackals such as she is dealing with."

Folsom had shrugged his shoulders. "We all have to learn."

And yet, through her untiring efforts, Marcia was meeting with unexpected successes, which encouraged and lured her on.

At first she had arranged her schedule so that it was possible for her to return home at night; then, as her itinerary took her further and further away into the remote parts of the district, and the demands on her to hold night sessions became more and more insistent, she remained away three or four days at a time. On these occasions she would speak to Blake over the long-distance telephone after the night meeting; but frequently he was away on professional business when her call came and he would not hear from her for days at a time.

Today, as he drove along the lonely road, a by-path

leading to the main highway between Williston and Waverly, lined on either side with echinacae and wild sunflowers that thumped monotonously on the fenders and the body of his enclosed automobile, he thought of Marcia. He was wondering if it were possible that her interest in him was on the wane, for she had behaved very strangely of late. How much more of her time would she give to politics? Had he, for both his and her sakes, done the right thing when he consented to her going on these tours? Should he ask her to discontinue them? What to do was a vexing problem; but, understanding Marcia as he did, he knew that she was too inflexible to be called back from a thing that was half finished. Then, too, he was not resilient enough to easily think of rescinding what he had granted.

Near the junction of the two roads he slackened his speed. He was now on a high hill that sloped gently to the southward, disclosing a wide expanse of level country that stretched away from either bank of a broad river. Here and there drainage ditches and railway lines cut the otherwise perfectly checkered fields into triangles and rectangles. In the midst of these fields, on the north bank of the river, lying placidly under a lazy haze of factory smoke, was Williston.

He brought his automobile to a standstill, undecided which way to turn; nor did he care to decide, for a while at least. He was going nowhere in particular. And the sight of Marcia's home town in the distance gave him a peculiar sense of satisfaction. He remained there for a long time, meditating. At last, when the sun had crept below the green visor on his windshield, he roused himself. At about the same time the roar of a powerful motor car reached his ears. Though he could not see it, he knew that it must be traveling at a dizzy rate of speed, and from the long, furiously agitated cloud of yellow dust left hanging in its wake, it was evident that the car was approaching him from the direction of Williston. Almost instantly, the car hove into sight over the last knoll that lay between them, flashing past a moment later. But the speed was not too terrific for Blake's sharp eyes to discern positively that one of its occupants was Marcia; the other,

the driver, was a man. Blake, known as one of the fastest drivers in Waverly, looked after them in horror.

"Marcia!" he gasped. "What is making her take such chances? Why does she permit such recklessness?"

He started his motor and set off in pursuit. Their machine was disappearing behind a distant hillock when he turned into the state highway, the yellow clay dust not quite so thick as it had been. They had evidently slackened their speed, but Blake for some reason was seized with an irresistible desire to overtake them. His speedy car rapidly gained momentum, swaying perilously as it dashed over the hills, making Blake speculate what might happen if anything went wrong. He was rapidly narrowing the distance between himself and the automobile he was determined to overtake, when it seemed to suddenly take wings, and he was left hopelessly in the rear. He resolutely followed the fleeing car, driving through a constantly thickening curtain of blinding dust at the risk of his life.

Then there was no more dust. The end came as abruptly as its appearance at the cross-roads, when the first sound of the motor reached Blake. He applied his brakes sharply, the soggy condition of the road nearly throwing him off the high, narrow grade.

Far down the side of the embankment, deep in a plum thicket, was the automobile that had been traveling so furiously, totally demolished. Blake's car had hardly stopped when he jumped out and hastened to the wreckage, from under which agonized moans were issuing, as well as a slender curl of black smoke.

Marcia was lying by the side of the car, held captive by her arm, which was pinioned between the door and its frame. Blake knelt down and began extricating her. He worked cautiously to avoid further injury to her arm, for the least movement of her body or the wreckage seemed to intensify her pain, though at times she struggled to free herself. Apparently her efforts were instinctive, for her eyes were stark and she maintained an incoherent chant. Her face was deathly pale, and when Blake succeeded in freeing her, she collapsed utterly. He carried

her hastily up the steep bank and placed her on an improvised bed made of a robe and a linen dust-coat.

Then he returned for her companion, but the man whom he had seen driving the automobile was nowhere to be found. He searched for him in the grass and bushes nearby, and failing to find him, he put his powerful frame against the wreckage and gave a mighty shove, turning it over and sending it rolling further down the bank. The body of an unconscious man, a stranger to Blake, was revealed half buried in the soft earth when the now flaming mass was removed. Blake gathered him in his arms and dragged him to safety, some distance from Marcia.

"It looks as if he were done for," murmured Blake when the man showed no sign of life. His mangled legs were horribly out of line with his body. An examination of the heart revealed that it was beating, although when Blake inserted a hypodermic of strychnine there was still no evidence of life.

Just then there was a terrific detonation, indicating that the fire had reached the gas-tank. Marcia revived sufficiently to hear it. "My God!" she whispered. "My God!"

Then she again lapsed into unconsciousness. The movement caused her injured arm to resume bleeding, the blood oozing through the temporary dressing Blake had hastily applied. He removed the soiled bandages and applied a styptic to the wound, the action of the astringent and the snug bandaging making her wince reflexly; but despite her rousing her breathing was shallow and the heart action bad. He had a little brandy in his case and he gave her a sip of it, then turned his attention again to her companion. He raised the man's head and slowly poured what liquor remained in the vial into his mouth. The reflexes compelled him to swallow; it was the first sign of life he had shown. Blake hastened to do what he could for the man's injuries before he should become conscious of pain. Splints, made from pieces of the destroyed automobile and padded with grass, were applied to his broken legs, while the cuts on his body and face were dressed with what makeshifts Blake found in his emergency case.

Marcia was by now tossing and moaning pitifully, and Blake turned his attentions to her. He was compelled to restrain her forcibly, and the resistance she made to his efforts seemed to sap the last of her vitality. Her appearance grew very alarming, making Blake extremely doubtful whether she was able to react from the shock resulting from her injuries. For the first time in his life he grew panicky. When Marcia lay quiet he feared she was dead, and when she struggled for breath he was sure she was dying, but in both contingencies he was utterly helpless to do anything for her. Although a very able doctor in the routine practice of medicine, her condition, complicated by his absorbing love for her, completely baffled him. Just when he was about to give her up as lost, Marcia surprised him by opening her eyes in a bewildered stare.

He knelt down beside her; she frowned and gazed about vaguely, as if trying to put together something her mind was unable to formulate; she touched her injured arm gently in several places, each contact causing her a twinge of pain. She was mystified because she found herself unable to move. For some time she vaguely studied Blake, who was bending over her, whispering, "Marcia, I love you, dear."

She closed and opened her eyes, several times, irritated that she could not associate the sound of the voice with the shapeless, meaningless blur that was hovering over her. At last she drew her hand over her eyes, as if brushing away something that was obscuring her vision; then her hand passed slowly from her face to his.

"Donald!" she murmured, trying to raise herself. "How is it that you are here?"

He held her tenderly in his arms. "I'll take care of you, dear, don't worry. You are hurt—quite badly. Please be quiet."

"I ache all over," she complained. "My arm is the worst, though."

"It is severely cut. . . . But it will be all right. Everything will be all right."

She moved a little, making feeble efforts to get up,

driven by the intense pain. But she fell back exhausted. "Oh, I am so sick," she gasped.

"Don't move, please," Blake implored her. "I'll give you something to ease the pain." He took several pellets from a carton in his kit. "Take these," he said. "They'll make you feel better."

"Boo—they're bitter," she shuddered. "And I can't swallow them without water. My mouth is so dry."

He gave her a sip of the claggy water he had drained from the automobile radiator when he prepared the hypodermic for her companion. Although it undoubtedly was more distasteful than the medicine, she did not object to it. Then he rearranged the things on which she was lying, trying to make her more comfortable.

"There, now," he said. "How's that?"

"That's better," she thanked him.

"If you are comfortable I'll go over and see how your companion is getting along," he suggested.

"Yes. . . . Mr. Willets. Where is he?"

So the man was Willets. She had told Blake about this man the last time she had talked with him over the telephone. He had surmised that the unconscious man might be Willets, but he had not been sure.

"He's back there," he said curtly.

"Is he hurt?"

"Yes."

"Very much?"

"Quite severely."

"More than I am?"

"I think so."

"Then go to him," she begged. "He probably needs your attention more than I do."

Blake left her without replying. He found Willets painfully conscious of his injuries. Blake gave him some of the same kind of pills Marcia had taken, and when Willets appeared to be resting easier, returned to his wife.

"How is he?" she asked.

"He is all right," he told her. "Don't worry. . . . about him."

She thought he had spoken a little testily.

"This is all my fault," she assumed the blame.

"I saw who was driving!"

"I hope you won't hold this against him, Donald. It was I who made him drive so fast. We were keeping ahead of another car that left Williston just as we did, and when I saw it was gaining on us, I urged him to speed up. Mr. Willets did as I told him, and instantly we seemed to fly. Then . . . came the crash. It wasn't his fault, Don, that this happened."

"I understand. Just be quiet."

Passing automobilists stopped and offered their services, though there was little they could do except look on curiously. Blake commandeered one, however, to go to a neighboring farmhouse and telephone for the Waverly ambulance.

When the ambulance arrived, Harry Willets was taken to the Waverly hospital, where for a week his life hung in the balance. At times it seemed that the vital spark must flicker out, and even the optimistic Blake despaired over the condition of his patient. Then, in a most remarkable way, the native vitality of the man responded to his strong will-power. The guttering flame seemed to have ignited a reserve energy somewhere deep within him, renewing his hold on life. After that his improvement was gradual but certain, and it was not long before he was able to take up the management of Goodrich's campaign from his bed.

Marcia, her arm still swathed in bandages, had resumed her campaigning activities, that were now taking her over the greater part of the state. She was sending reports home that everywhere she was enthusiastically greeted, and that her success was progressively mounting. In some mysterious way it seemed that somehow her drawing power had been enhanced.

* * * * *

"You'll be able to leave the hospital in a few days," Blake consoled Willets when he began to fret at his enforced inactivity. "You've become an old standby here," he added. "I think I'll let you out just four weeks to the day that you were brought in. Time flies, doesn't it?"

"Not for me," Willets disagreed. He pointed to the weights and ropes still attached to his legs, adding, "I'd

rather be in jail than have these things to contend with."

"I left them on purposely to keep you quiet," Blake bantered.

"Every day I've been here has seemed like a month," Willets complained.

His nurse interposed with mock reproof. "We thought you were enjoying your stay here, Mr. Willets."

He hastened to tell her that she had misconstrued what he had said, explaining that his stay in the hospital had been made as comfortable, and even enjoyable, as such an experience could possibly be, inferring, of course, that it had been her care that had made it so.

The nurse, accustomed to such idle flattery, was perfectly poised. "I wasn't looking for compliments," she explained. "But I thought possibly your complaint might be misleading to Doctor Blake."

"Let me make myself clear," Willets declared. "My stay here has convinced me that nurses are angels."

Blake smiled. "I want to be considered an angel, too," he explained, "so I'm going to remove those weights and splints right away."

As he rose to take off his coat he thought he noticed a significantly tender glance pass between Willets and the nurse. Probably because he was anxious that they should be attracted by each other, it seemed to him that their interest was not altogether superficial. But he was entirely wrong in his conclusion. Their concern for each other was much the same feeling Blake himself cherished for Willets; he represented a life he had saved, not alone by his medical and surgical skill, but with the aid of his unusual physical strength which had enabled him to release Willets from the burning car.

"You'll want the dressing cart, Doctor?" the nurse asked crisply.

"I think I will."

She whisked noiselessly out of the door, her rubber-heeled shoes were making only the softest patter as she walked along the corridor.

"She's a mighty fine girl," Willets remarked.

"They have a dandy lot of nurses here," agreed the doctor, busying himself with the weights.

"You're sure you're not hurrying things too much, Doc?" Willets wanted to know. "I'd rather stay a week longer than is necessary than leave an hour too soon."

"It's time to put your stiffened joints into motion," Blake explained. He examined the fractures by lightly palpating the calloused bone through the bandages. "That break in the ankle might be permanently ankylosed in another week," he added. "I'm not certain that such isn't the case even now."

Blake had failed to take into consideration the fact that Willets' understanding of medical terms was limited. What he had said put his patient in grave doubt as to the condition of his injuries. He regarded his bandaged foot with apprehension, then moved the toes carefully.

"Look at that, Doc," he said gleefully. "They don't act like cripples."

Blake laughed. "No, they don't; but that doesn't signify anything."

"Well, you know best." And Willets subsided.

* * * * *

The following few days were the loneliest Blake had spent since his marriage. Marcia had been continuously away a fortnight; the demands on her for speaking dates that were not on her regular schedule were so persistent that she found it difficult to decline any of them. In assuming this extra work she seldom had more than a few hours out of the twenty-four to herself, and she used these for rest and recuperation rather than for making the long and tiresome journey home.

Because he craved companionship, Blake was counting the days until Willets would be discharged from the hospital, for he had promised to spend his out-of-the-hospital convalescence at the Blake home. A few days before Willets' coming, Blake requested Pansy, the maid Marcia had vowed never to employ, and the only person to share the house with him since his wife had aspired to a political career, to prepare the guest room for the anticipated visitor.

Pansy was a deliquescent sort of person past thirty, who had never married. There was something peculiarly self-effacing about her. Blake never saw her except when

he went into the kitchen or when he rang. She placed a list of questions beside his plate every morning at breakfast, and he invariably wrote his answers on the sufficiently wide margin of the same paper. It was through this medium that he had informed her he intended to have Willets as his guest.

The service of meals was announced by two taps of the bell on the table, and it made no difference how promptly he entered the room following the sound of the bell, she was never there. Because Blake eventually became interested in this game of evasion, he had on several occasions attempted to trap her, but always without success. He invariably found the room as deserted as if no one had been in it for days, except that there was hot, savory food on the table; even the swinging door between the kitchen and dining-room was motionless.

Then one day she astounded him by approaching him unceremoniously. "Doctor Blake, I wish you would look for another girl to do your work. I am going to leave."

"You are going to leave?"

"Yes, at once. . . . Before Mrs. Blake comes home."

In spite of her mild eccentricities her services were highly satisfactory, and he disliked the idea of having to replace her.

"Why are you leaving, Pansy?" he asked.

To him she was just Pansy; whatever her other name was did not concern him. He did not remember ever having heard her surname, if she had one.

She showed signs of embarrassment. "I must leave before your wife comes back," she insisted. "I did something dreadful!"

Blake's face brightened. "Now, Pansy, you haven't done anything dreadful. You're just imagining things!"

"Oh, yes, I did. You'll think so, too, when I tell you."

"Tell me, what did you do?"

She was retreating down the hall toward his bedroom. "I'll show you." In a moment she came back with a broken ivory geisha girl. "I broke that this morning when I was cleaning," she said. "Mrs. Blake thought so much of it. She told me you carved it for her and she wouldn't

part with it for anything in the world. It was the only thing she cautioned me to be careful with."

"I remember how pleased she was when I gave it to her," he admitted.

"I am sorry I broke it. . . . I liked it here."

Certain thoughts recurred to Blake's mind that had come while he was working on the geisha girl—that was during the first winter of his acquaintance with Marcia. The carving was the last he had attempted, as if Marcia had come into his life to replace a hobby he had ridden since his grammar school days. His thoughts went back and dwelt on his first piece of work of this kind that had created what he considered at that time a noteworthy impression; it was a likeness of his teacher, carved on the back of his school desk. He very vividly recalled the five stinging lashes his teacher had administered across each open hand with a leather quirt. His thoughts retraced the years that followed. During those years he had carved everything from pipes to bas-reliefs, from materials ranging from peach stones to semi-precious gems. But the thing had become a lost art with him, and he was satisfied that it should be that way.

He turned to Pansy. She was standing waiting to receive sentence. "Never mind a little thing like that," he assured her. "The piece was quite unimportant. We can get along without it."

"It wasn't unimportant to Mrs. Blake," Pansy insisted. "I couldn't stand to face her."

"Don't say anything about it. She won't miss it."

"She will. . . . I know she will. I want to pay you for it and leave today, Doctor Blake."

For a moment Blake was in a quandary to know how to persuade Pansy to remain. Then he solved the problem. "I know how to fix that," he told her. "I'll carve another."

And so it was Pansy who caused him to resume the art of lapidary, which was to be of such a great help to him later in life.

* * * * *

Events were shaping rapidly. Marcia had returned home triumphant, hailed as the ablest woman campaigner

in the state. The Fall election had come and gone. Governor Goodrich had been returned victor with the largest plurality that had ever elected a governor in that state. Judge Day had died on the eve of the election. Harry Willets, still a guest in the Blake home, had received word of his appointment to a high political position in Washington.

Of the lesser events, even as concerning Blake, the birth of Phyllis' baby might be mentioned. It was a boy, whom she named Curtis, for she felt that the child was entitled to that much from his father. Doctor Worth, the attending physician, reported favorably on the condition of both mother and baby. This was especially gratifying to Blake; the satisfaction of having redeemed what had seemed so hopelessly lost was beyond material measure. Then he recalled that he had neglected to make even the smallest contribution toward the household of Phyllis and Gracie since they began housekeeping. The last time he had seen Phyllis was when she had left the hospital, when she had climbed in Worth's car and waved back at him as he stood watching them.

He sent for Gracie. It seemed hours before she appeared. When a thing was out of his thoughts it was out completely, but when a transaction required his attention he was never satisfied until it had been concluded. Although he was busy with patients, he frequently looked at his watch, and once he even surveyed the occupants of the waiting-room to satisfy himself that Gracie had not yet made her appearance. Then her arrival was announced.

"How are things going, Gracie?" he asked when her broad feet had clumped to a chair and she had dropped into it. "Haven't heard from you for months. Don't you remember me telling you to call on me when your funds ran low?"

"Our funds ain't got low yet, Doctor Blake."

"They haven't?" he said, surprised. "Do you mean to tell me that the two of you have lived all this time on what was left over from three hundred dollars?"

"No. . . . No, sir."

"Then where did you get the money?"

She was in a quandary. She was slow to answer. At length she drawled, "You see, Doctor Blake, it took more money 'an I suspected—to buy all them necessary contraptions I wan't figurin' on."

"Necessary contraptions?"

"Ye-ah," whimpered Gracie. "You surely know, don't you?"

"I'm not sure that I do."

"About Ph—Mrs. Jones' baby?"

He was positive now that Gracie knew Phyllis as Mrs. Jones only because he demanded it. "Oh, certainly," he assured her easily. And coming back to what had prompted him to send for her, he asked, "Now then, tell me, where did you get the money to obtain the things you speak about?"

She looked to either side as if trying to decide which way to jump. "Mrs. Jones was left a legacy," she offered at length. "She's got mos' all sorts of money."

He knew she was lying to protect her mistress, and he admired her for her loyalty.

* * * * *

When Willets recovered sufficiently to ramble about the grounds of the Blake residence, and to climb into an automobile with the aid of another person, Mrs. Folsom, under pretense of having much in common with him because of his political affiliations with her husband, spared no effort to make his stay in Waverly pleasant. She called for him daily in her electric car. While receiving her assistance, he observed the utmost caution, moving painfully and with irksome slowness, and commending her for her patience with him.

She drove slowly on these daily journeys, creeping along the street at a snail-like pace, as though endeavoring to impress a lesson on him so indelibly that he would never again resort to reckless speeding. She invariably engaged her companion in affable conversation, oblivious to everything else, even failing to recognize her most intimate acquaintances as they stood on street crossings waiting for her slowly-moving car to pass.

Marcia watched the two with considerable satisfaction. She might have encouraged them had they shown any

signs of needing it. The opinions that had been expressed when the accident occurred were many, some so unflattering to Marcia's reputation that she was uneasy lest some of the unpleasant gossip should reach Blake. She might have abandoned her campaign tour after the accident if idle talk had not impelled her to continue it; in that way she proposed to defeat the notion that her adherence to her political affiliation was altogether contingent on whether or not Mr. Willets was able to accompany her on speaking tours. Since she had hushed that rumor so completely, she was determined to show that Willets was not even her guest. So when it was Mrs. Folsom's turn to serve Thursday afternoon tea at the Country Club, and she asked Willets to be the honor guest, Marcia persuaded Blake to accompany her. They had gone out early and were playing golf when Mrs. Folsom and Willets drove into a parking place near the clubhouse.

But it is difficult to remove gossip's sting. Some people may be convinced they are wrong and still cling to their original opinions. When the players came in from the course at five o'clock, Mrs. Strachan, almost a total stranger to Marcia, joined the group that was congratulating her on her successful campaign. After listening a moment, she said, "You must be delighted with the way your guest is improving, Mrs. Blake. I can't imagine how you were able to take care of him when he couldn't walk."

Marcia felt as though a heavy weight had suddenly fallen and crushed her. First her blood ran hot, then cold; then it was as if her body became entirely bloodless. Blake had stopped to give instructions to the caretaker for repairs on his clubs. She was glad he was not there. A feeling of hatred toward everyone took possession of her when she saw Willets reclining in a wicker rocker on the sun-porch, where he had basked with Mrs. Folsom while the games were in progress. She thought of a variety of cutting retorts, but finding none of them appropriate, she assumed an attitude of nonchalance. "Doctor Blake is more interested in his progress than I am."

"Is it possible!"

"He is Doctor Blake's guest and patient—not mine."

"I thought he was yours, unreservedly."

For almost the first time in her life Marcia was at a complete loss. Her mind was an obscure maze of thwarted impulses. "If he were my guest I wouldn't be ashamed of it," she said.

Mrs. Strachan laughed sarcastically and departed.

This was the first real bitterness Marcia had experienced in her life since coming to Waverly. A strong desire seized her to flee from it all. The beautiful little city she had once loved she now detested; she was confident that none of the Waverly people could qualify as her friends. To tolerate them as her husband's business and professional associates was trying enough. The most distressing thing about the whole wretched business was the fact that it all resulted from her venture into politics—something she could have so easily avoided. But from now on she would live in a little world of her own—with Blake.

* * * * *

Folsom had been out of town for several days, looking after matters in connection with his business. That evening Blake received a telegram from him stating he had been offered several thousand sheep at a price that should net them a good profit.

Blake replied in a single word, "Buy."

Later that evening Folsom sent another telegram. It read: "Your presence imperative. Will expect you on the morning train."

He spoke about it to Marcia.

"I don't want you to go," she objected. "You *mustn't* go."

He did not understand her attitude. It was the first time he could remember that she had not been in accord with his plans when they involved his business or professional interests.

"It is a business matter of great importance," he explained. "I've gone this far and in justice to Folsom I feel I should go through with it."

"Then I'm going too."

"It wouldn't do for both of us to desert Mr. Willets as

if he were a total stranger," he said, considerably puzzled and annoyed.

Marcia made herself clear. "Don't you understand? That is the reason I want to go with you."

"Because of Mr. Willets?"

"Yes!"

Blake laughed a bit dubiously. "He is our guest, you know."

How could any man be so perfectly undisturbed in the face of what seemed to Marcia an imminent danger! He had no doubt heard the rumors about her and Willets. Or was his apparent indifference due to a lack of interest in her? She reassured herself that it was his supreme confidence in her that was responsible.

"He is *your* guest," she reminded him, "not mine." It had begun to rain, and Marcia rose to close the windows.

"You are right. I invited him while you were away."

At that moment footsteps could be heard on the walk, then there was a thumping on the porch and the clatter at the knocker. Before Blake could reach the door it opened and Mrs. Folsom, followed by Harry Willets, came in.

"What a perfectly charming slush," was Mrs. Folsom's meaningless lament. "Why don't you have a tarpaulined pergola over your driveway for rainy weather, Don?"

The Folsoms had a porte-cochere, and Mrs. Folsom always made the most of what she had by constantly referring to it.

"That's a luxury for the rich," he said with flattering implications. "But anything like that isn't necessary when you have a perfectly capable escort like Mr. Willets."

"He is a cripple," she reminded him. "See how he limps. I had to help him."

"And you say that after the way he hurried you up the walk a moment ago."

"Oh, circumstances, you know, make a difference."

Willets remained silent, engrossed in shaking the water from his dripping clothes. He had so gallantly shared his umbrella with Mrs. Folsom to protect her hat and frock from the rain that he was completely drenched.

"Why did you hurry so?" Marcia asked. "Why didn't you wait until it stopped raining?"

"Mr. Willets suddenly decided to leave on the early morning train. He wanted to come in to tell you about it before you retired," Mrs. Folsom explained.

Blake thought quickly. "So you are leaving?"

"I must get to work," Willets grumbled a little sullenly. "I've lazed around too long now."

"Are you going east on the six o'clock?" Marcia inquired idly.

"If I can wake up that early."

"We expect to go on the same train," she enlightened him. "Donald received a telegram calling him away on business."

"Had a message from Folsom," offered Blake, "asking me to join him in a deal he has under consideration." He handed the telegram to Mrs. Folsom. "Read what he has to say."

Mrs. Folsom frowned as she read the telegram; then she looked up pettishly. "It's queer he hasn't told me about it. . . . Guess I'll go along."

Willets remained silent while plans were being made for catching the early train. Blake noticed that it had annoyed him when Mrs. Folsom announced her intention to accompany them. Was it possible that they had had a tilt? He wondered.

* * * * *

The next morning Blake almost missed his train. An hour before it left, Worth, his assistant, came to the house to see him. He looked haggard and worn.

"Mrs. Jones' baby is very sick," he announced. "I was out there all night."

"Mrs. Jones' baby? Who is she?"

"Mrs. Margaret Jones. You know her. She lives in your house."

"Oh, ye-e-s. Of course I do. What's the matter with the baby?"

"I'm not sure. You'd better go out and see him. He'll probably die."

"Wait a moment. We'll go out together."

Blake hurried to tell Marcia to proceed to the depot where he would meet her. Willets was at the breakfast

table, apparently recovered from the moodiness of the night before.

"Don't be late," he warned Blake. "People might think Marcia and I are eloping!"

Blake laughed appreciatively, but Marcia, thinking of the incident at the Country Club the previous day, could find no humor in it. Following Blake into an adjoining room, she began, "If I am to go to the depot alone with Mr. Willets I'll stay home."

"Confound it!" he said under his breath. "Why all this fuss? Why do you refuse to go with him?" he demanded irritably.

"There's been talk."

"About you and Willets?"

"Yes."

"I haven't heard any. Who's been talking?"

"A Mrs. Straching—I think that is her name—"

"Her name is Strachan," he corrected her. "Her husband is in the van business."

"Well, whoever she is, she spoke insinuatingly to me about Mr. Willets staying here."

"Don't pay any attention to what she said. Her opinion amounts to nothing."

She persisted. "There are others who must be considered."

Because he was in a hurry to be off with Worth, he did not argue further; he was trying to think of some arrangement that would be agreeable to her.

"Telephone to Mrs. Folsom and ask her to drive this way and take you along."

"That'll be all right," she assented.

He hastened to the waiting car. "She may be leaving early," he called back. "You had better telephone at once."

"I will."

The streets in the outlying part of town where Phyllis lived had been turned into a morass by the heavy rain that had fallen during the night, and the automobile skidded perilously from side to side. When they finally reached the house Blake jumped out and hurried in before Worth had time even to shut off the motor.

Gracie was seated on a couch, holding the baby.

"Doctor Blake, this here chil' am awful sick," she wailed. "He's mos' worried us to death."

"Let me see him."

She pulled back the blanket that covered the baby.

"You keep him too warm," Blake stated. "The fever is burning him up."

Blake asked Worth to take the temperature while he listened to the lungs, for the infant was gasping for breath. It was the first time he had seen the child, and he was startled by its marked likeness to Lyman Curtis. All infantile ailments are baffling, in many instances more so to the doctor than the mother. The condition of the baby was disconcerting to Blake and he did not blame Worth for failing to make a diagnosis. Finally he examined the throat. "There is the trouble. It's diphtheria."

Gracie became helpless with fear for herself as well as for the baby and Phyllis. "Then he can't git well, can he, Doctor Blake?"

"He'll get well, Gracie," Blake assured her. He turned to Worth. "Give the baby twenty thousand units of anti-toxin in broken doses during the course of the day."

"I s'pose we all is gwine to take it?" asked Gracie.

"No, you won't. Doctor Worth will give prophylactic dosages of antitoxin to you and the mother—" He stopped abruptly. "Where is the mother?" he demanded.

Gracie pointed to the bedroom. "In there. She's mos' distractioned."

Blake found Phyllis lying on the bed, sobbing abandonly. Girl-like, she had fled from the responsibility that seemed too heavy. He sat down on the bed beside her. Startled, she lifted her head. When she saw who it was, she drew a sigh of relief. "Now I know my baby will live," she said tremulously. "Doctor Blake, you'll save him like you did me?"

"Yes," he said, "your baby will live." He continued to look at her, observing for the first time that she was very pretty.

Chapter VII

Nearly three years had elapsed. The Blakes had lived the happy life of two ideally-mated people, for Marcia had withdrawn from politics, the only issue that had so far threatened to cause dissension between them, and even that disaffection had by no means assumed serious proportions. All that now remained to remind them of that time was the presence of Pansy in their household and a wicked looking scar on Marcia's arm.

Far from being demonstrative, the Blakes were frequently accused of coldness because of their apparent indifference to each other in public. This very restraint reacted in a greater devotion to each other in their intimate life together, Marcia in particular devoting herself exclusively to Don's happiness and well-being. It required an intuitive person like old Mrs. Donhagen to sense the perfect accord that existed between the Blakes. She declared that the doctor and his wife were building their love on a foundation substantial enough to endure the rigors of time immortal.

As their life took stabilizing roots, their home, rid of its original newness, was assuming the staid appearance of assurance and permanency. It was gradually hiding itself behind the trees and shrubs Marcia had helped the nurseryman plant; the colors of the house and the surrounding landscape were blending together in nature's scheme, as the fur and feathers of game blend with its environs.

Blake, as if acting on the hint dropped by Mrs. Folsom, had had a porte-cochere built over the driveway. Marcia had enlarged her garden, planting more old-fashioned perennials each year. The puny climbing rose she had received through the mail as a magazine subscription prize was now a lusty growth that peeped over the window-sill into the bedroom.

As Blake saw Pansy becoming more and more a defi-

nately accepted occupant of the room Marcia had declared would be a playroom for children, he wondered if the time would ever come when they would have those children. Marcia seemed perfectly content without them. It might have seemed that the possibility never entered her mind, had she not spoken about it negatively. Her reference was something like this: "It would be terribly difficult for me to give birth to a child." Although Blake was curious to know the reason for her horror, some curious inhibition kept him from going into details with her, and in that way they lived from day to day and from week to week unfortunately ignorant of many fundamentals about each other.

Then something happened that upset the even tenor of life for the Blakes. Folsom came to Marcia with an ax to grind. He had selected her to defeat the protégé of an opponent who was threatening to supplant him. In his masterful way he demanded that she re-enter politics; this time he was not asking for her services as a supporter, but had plans by which her name would appear on the ballot. He wanted her to enter the race as delegate to the National Convention, explaining that she was entitled to reap at least some of the fruits of her efforts. She received him rather favorably, the satisfaction of her former success still thrilling her. Besides, her confidence in her ability to achieve even greater success spurred her to accept, only to find this clashing with her promise to herself never to enter the work again.

"Why scorn the thing to which you are naturally adapted?" Folsom urged.

And she replied with practically the same answer she had given him when she took up politics before. "My duty is here—in my home."

The reply satisfied Folsom. He saw no reason for discouragement if this was the most serious obstacle he was likely to encounter. Because he believed that he had previously observed signs of relenting, he had his campaign of persuasion all mapped out this time.

He entered on a lengthy discourse. He expressed his opinion that it was a woman's duty to apply herself where the fullest expression could be found for her talents, and

not where custom directed. Of course, if a woman possessed no other gifts than the ability to cook, mend and tend babies, it was proper that she should limit her sphere of activities to her home; but if she was capable of other things it was her duty to let the world benefit thereby.

"Is it really your desire to confine yourself strictly to your home?" he demanded.

"If I'd follow my real inclination," she confided, "I would do as you have suggested. But this is an instance when I must refuse to let my desires sway me."

Folsom felt that at last he had broken the ice. Marcia's reply gave him real encouragement. He was succeeding better than he had hoped.

"No one is any more foot-loose than you are," he said, gaining confidence. "If you had children to look after I wouldn't ask you to do this for me."

"Children," she thought. "No, I haven't any children to hold me." And it vaguely pleased her that she had none. She must be reasonable with Folsom, for he was arguing along her own line of thought. She mused further, "Donald could get along without me for such a short time. Pansy is so reliable; she keeps house as well as I do."

Folsom was watching her intently when she looked up. "You know," she said, "it's a hard thing for me to decide."

"Would you mind if I spoke to Blake about it?"

"You may if you want to."

Folsom reached for his cane and got up. He felt that he had won. Marcia went to the door with him.

"I'll see Blake today," he fired as a parting shot. "In the meantime, I'm depending on you."

She made no reply.

* * * * *

It was not without a great deal of discussion and argument that Blake gave his consent for Marcia's return to politics. But at length he was practically forced into it by Folsom's threatening attitude, in which he displayed an inclination to drop Blake from the sheep business unless he yielded. A little later he would have annulled what he had granted had not Marcia, through more of Folsom's

scheming, already vigorously resumed her political affiliations. She was working for herself this time; this had been pounded into her so energetically that perhaps nothing could have dissuaded her. The feeling that she was the one to receive the benefit of her efforts, if any was derived, was intensely alluring.

Because of the thoroughness with which Marcia threw herself into any task, she was making hard work of her present undertaking. Then, too, Folsom had been crossed late in the campaign, leaving him little time in which to fight back, though it was to be a hot battle while it lasted. These circumstances nearly doubled the strain under which Marcia worked. She was kept away from home most of the time, but even when she was not touring the district, she was usually too busy making plans and outlining speeches to show much consideration for Blake. For ten days prior to the election, she was away from home continuously.

For the sake of diversion from the lonely routine of his home life, Blake became a frequenter of the Meadow Club, a social organization limited to a few dozen of the supposedly elite of the town. Here he spent long hours reading the same material he could have read at home, playing the same games of cards he could have played with his neighbors, listening to stories that had been told him over and over weeks before.

But when the campaign was over and Marcia was chosen as a delegate, during the time she was waiting to leave to attend the convention, the Blakes resumed normal relations. But all the while Blake was dreading what was to follow—the day of her departure and the loneliness her absence was certain to cause him. He was as dismayed at the prospect as she was happily excited over it.

He was exceedingly interested in the progress Marcia had so far made, but beyond this there was an irrepres- sible feeling that the proper place for her was in her home. There was no doubt in his mind that she was mentally 'on the fence', so to speak—a condition he was certain could not last long. She must make up her mind to an undivided allegiance, or the decision would automatically be made for her.

He might have worried over this had there not been plenty of other things to keep his mind occupied, even when he did not devote himself as exclusively to his profession as he had heretofore. His medical and surgical practice had doubled; his business venture with Folsom had been increasingly successful. Although they remained very silent regarding the amount of money they were making, those who took an interest in their affairs knew that it had been remunerative enough to make both independently rich.

Besides this, Blake had had the work and worry entailed by the construction of a six-story store and office building to contend with. Waverly had suffered a disastrous fire, and he had purchased the site of a destroyed structure on the busiest corner, on which he was erecting the finest building in town. However, all these concerns would have been mere play had his domestic life not been harassing him. He was an indefatigable worker, never satisfied unless he could see an endless array of tasks reaching out before him. And because this desire for occupation had increased since Marcia's latest political venture, he constantly carried a piece of ivory in his pocket, filling the moments not occupied with business or his profession, with carving. When he was at home, where he had the equipment, and this feeling came over him, he whiled away the time cutting reliefs on peridot and sardonyx.

During the last few weeks of the interval between Marcia's election as a delegate to the convention and her departure, Blake made a splendid effort to renounce both his hobbies and his work; he wanted to spend as much of his time with her as possible. And those days seemed to bring them closer together, if that was possible, than all the rest of their married life; at times it seemed as if they stood on top of the world, the crowns of their heads touching heaven.

The heat of mid-summer was intense, and Marcia and her husband resigned themselves to the languor that the season invariably induces. They sought diversions that were purely recreative, spending much of their time driving into the country to pick wild berries and flowers. On

such occasions Marcia prepared a basket of lunch to take along, and they would remain the entire day, donning bathing suits and swimming in the sandy river when they tired of exploring its banks and roaming the woods. In this way their acquaintance broadened rapidly throughout the rural districts, and besides being invited to country dances, they received invitations to attend gatherings that ranged from baptismal celebrations to the more diverting business of sampling home brew.

Then, quite abruptly, there arose misunderstandings. They were driving home from some affair when Marcia announced, "Don, I want you along when I attend the convention."

So she was still determined to go; he had begun to hope that her avoidance of the subject meant that she had tired of the prospect and would willingly give it up. Though he had not openly demanded that she remain at home, he had clearly indicated in other ways that he objected to her going. There was yet one way he had not tried—violent opposition.

"Wouldn't that be fine," he said sarcastically, "both of us going to the convention!"

"That will be fine," she echoed, "because you're going."

He thought a long time before he spoke again. It was a difficult matter for him to cross her deliberately. The automobile jolted over a rough place in the road as he turned sharply to avoid a rut.

"I've been dallying around too much now," he drawled, without looking up. "And I thought perhaps you had had about enough of it, too!"

She turned abruptly to face him. Even before she replied he realized he had struck the note aimed at.

"So you consider the time you spend with me wasted?" she demanded. "Is that what you really mean?"

"No! no!" he denied, his tone casual. "But one is in danger of permitting an inequality in the distribution of his energy," he continued, "and I've done that. I've loafed so much that I'm afraid for myself. I detest the thought of returning to work, and unless I go back soon it's a question whether I'll have sufficient self-control ever to force myself back."

Marcia scoffed at the idea. "That's an excuse—just a weak excuse," she declared. "You don't want to go!"

He refused to deny that he did not want to accompany her. That worried her, but she was determined to conceal it from it. He had nothing to say, and she found his silence very exasperating.

"Isn't that the truth?" she urged, when she could no longer endure his silence. "Really, now, isn't it?"

"You know me well enough to know that I don't hide behind excuses. If I didn't want to go for any reason whatever I would say so in that many words. The fact is, other business, far more important than being an idler at a convention, requires my attention."

There it was! She stared at him. He had not taken his eyes off the road while he was speaking, and he continued to watch it with distracting concentration, his lips tense and his eyes rather hard.

Marcia began speaking slowly. "If you don't approve of my attending—"

"Why ask," he interrupted her brusquely, "when you know that's it! You know that I hate to deny you anything and you've taken unfair advantage of that. The best information I could get before election was that you would be defeated. You surprised me, however, and the fact that you beat a very strong opponent gave me considerable satisfaction. It has made me proud of you. That's what you've taken advantage of—my admiration for you!"

"Don, you're mistaken," she said huskily. "I just *want* you to go along. To be with me."

"By God," he said, striking the steering gear with his fist, "if you must go, leave me out of it! Do you understand?"

"I understand," she said, half under her breath. "I might have known."

Perhaps because he was expecting it, Blake thought he caught a tremor of anger in her voice. He was annoyed at himself for having spoken so harshly to her, but when he turned to look at her, he saw her calm eyes fixed on him in a sweet smile. If she was angry she was not showing it. He resumed his apparent pre-occupation in

the road, thinking possibly his attitude had been justified; because she was not vexed he presumed she admitted his case. He looked at her sidewise when she was not watching him, noting that her former serenity had turned to a sort of hard petulance. It was unnecessary for him to sham exasperation any longer, and the angrier he grew the harder his foot pressed down on the accelerator, until they were traveling at a dizzy pace. Marcia trembled with fear, and although she gave no visible sign, the terrible accident of nearly three years ago came back to her with horrid vividness.

"Anyway," she thought, "Mr. Willets didn't do it deliberately."

Arrived at the house, he stopped with a sudden and sullen application of the brakes. Marcia alighted, looked at her husband inquiringly, and when he appeared too busy shifting the gears to notice her, turned and went silently into the house. In driving to the garage Blake raced the motor unnecessarily. He was really angry with her for the first time in their life together. The knowledge came to her with a strange sense of bereavement and loss. It seemed as if she had lost everything she had ever possessed.

Marcia went to her room and removed her hat and fur, then sat down on the bed near a window to think and to wait for Blake. Although she had been waiting only a short time, it already seemed like hours since she had come in. She could hear her husband tinkering with the car in the garage, pretending to be busy. He wanted time to recover from his anger. Alone in the garage, the time was passing as slowly for Blake as it was for Marcia. He had only the Maltese cat, who lived in the garage, to talk to.

Marcia had lain down on the bed and buried her face in a pillow. She was not quite certain whether she was thinking or worrying when she heard her husband laugh and then say something. For a minute she did not breathe, hoping to catch what he was saying if he spoke again, curious to know with whom he was conversing. She raised herself stealthily from the pillow, drew the window draperies to one side, peering out at the dim reflection of

the headlights. In this position she remained until she grew cramped, but there were no further sound of voices. The light breeze that came through the open window made her cheeks cool, and, in touching them, she was surprised to find that they were moist with tears, that she had been crying.

A little later, when she was again reclining on the bed, she heard Blake walk past the window and up the kitchen steps. He shut the door with a bang when he came in; then, not finding her in her usual place in the living room, he went quickly and noiselessly to all parts of the house, searching for her. Having satisfied himself as to her whereabouts, he returned to the living room.

After diligent searching he succeeded in finding the evening paper. Marcia donned her kimono and passed through the room where he was sitting, presumably looking about to see that everything was in order for the night. He rustled the paper. When she came back, passing him in silence, he sighed heavily. She paused.

"Would you care to have me fix a lunch for you, Don?"

"No, thank you. I'm not hungry."

She took a step and paused again. "I have some fresh apple-sauce cake. . . . Would you like some of that?"

He looked up. A woman like her must be loved—every minute.

"It'll be too much trouble for you," he said, indicating he would eat even if he was not hungry. "Don't bother, dear."

"It's no trouble at all. . . . And I have some blackberries; you like those with cream. And preserved kumquats, and bread I made this morning."

She started for the kitchen. He sauntered after her. When she had prepared a lunch of delicious odds and ends, with which he had helped her, they sat down together. They had apparently forgotten there had been a misunderstanding.

* * * * *

Marcia probably had reason to fear the consequences of the first real dissension between herself and Blake. The possibility that this was the forerunner of other

quarrels was what worried her most. And when a few days later they disagreed over the amount of money she proposed to take while attending the convention, she knew that her anxiety had not been unfounded. She had not saved enough out of her allowance to defray the expenses her trip would involve, and she asked Blake for the remaining amount necessary. He turned her apparently simple request into a long and complicated problem. When he had finished his computations they showed conclusively that she could get along with even less money than she already had in hand. In telling her about it he seemed to infer that she was planning a rather gay and extravagant trip.

"Are you afraid that I'm going to squander a little of your money?" she asked defiantly.

"Not exactly."

"Then, 'exactly,' what do you mean?"

"I mean that you should travel and live as economically as proper traveling and living will permit."

"Proper?"

"Yes."

"I propose to conduct myself properly!" she snapped. "I always do."

"Oh, I know that," he insisted impatiently. "I mean, it is foolish to waste money."

"I wish you would go along," she begged, finding herself growing quarrelsome. "You'd enjoy it, Don."

"Do you expect a man to loaf because his wife thinks he should?" he demanded rather sharply.

Marcia frowned. "No, I don't!" she said fiercely. "But wouldn't it be advisable for you to be with your wife and keep her from spending too much of your meager supply of hard-earned money?"

The amazingness of her retort was a revelation to him. He had thought it impossible of her to voice such a sentiment. He had expected her to offer to remain home instead.

Feeling a bit guilty, he said, "Well, Marcia, I know you're not the only one who thinks I'm penurious."

She, in turn, was startled by his assertion. He had always been sensitive to any reference to his tight-fisted-

ness, and now he was admitting it—accusing himself of it. The word penurious had a sinister sound to her. Stingy, a synonym that expressed exactly the same meaning, was more agreeable to her ears. She had often considered her husband stingy, for to her mind everybody falls to one of two classes, stingy or liberal, and since Blake was not liberal she felt he must be stingy. But the term was in such common use that it really signified nothing. There was another word that had the same meaning and that she equally detested, but it persisted in eluding her.

“Who said you were penurious?” she demanded. “Who said that?”

“I never heard anyone *say* it about me. But I know people who think I am.”

“Why, Don, you’re nothing of the kind,” Marcia laughed a protest. “Of course, you’re just the least bit stingy, and that is not the worst—”

He interrupted her. “I knew you were driving at that! I knew it! You don’t know how it hurts to think I gave you reason to regard me in that sense. But I’m going to be different. I’ll never give you further cause to think me niggardly.”

“Niggardly!” she thought. “That is the word I was trying to think of—niggardly.”

His self-condemnation encouraged her to believe that she had really been wronged in some vague way. She was undecided just how, but there was no question that she had been or Blake would not have admitted it. Why had she failed until now to notice any of his faults? He had so many.

Marcia grew thoughtful. Various trivial happenings recalled themselves to her mind, engrossing her to such an extent that she failed to listen when Blake began a brief summary of his mistakes and how he proposed to overcome them.

“I’ve been confronted by too many obligations to handle them all properly,” he said, speaking in a low, even voice. “I made my own load too heavy, and it became necessary for me to be what I am. That is at an end. . . . From now on I’ll devote more time to the things that

really count. But you must not expect me to accompany you to the convention. . . . You know politics and politicians do not interest me."

She caught only the final sentence. "Then you are not interested in me?"

"Marcia, don't be absurd! Of course I'm interested in you."

"I'm a politician."

"Oh, well, I don't regard you in that light."

"I want to be."

"You are counted in on everything that takes you up and not down—"

"Then you think I'm going downward," she broke in. "Do you really think I'm doing that?"

"Not exactly."

"Please don't use that word *exactly*!! It expresses nothing in particular. Don't be vague, Don. You're really too big for that."

"Nor do I like the word *really* you employ so constantly!" he retorted hotly. "I don't care for it any more than you care for *exactly*."

"You're the funniest man I ever knew!"

"I know what is troubling you. You're intent on fault-finding. It's the damned politics you've gotten into that makes you that way. I'll admit that I have shortcomings like everyone else, but why begin just now to point them out?"

"I want you to know that *I* know you have faults."

"Don't worry," he admitted, "I think I'm more conscious of mine than you are of yours."

"It doesn't hurt you to be reminded of them," she said, deliberately tormenting him. "I'm just showing you how well I've known you in the past."

He had hoped to provoke her sufficiently to make her want to remain away from the convention, but he saw the futility of his hope. She had failed to yield to devotion and adulation. Nor was he accomplishing anything by the masterful manner he had just assumed. What was there left for him to do? He could think of nothing, yet he could not rid himself of the ominous feeling which

he experienced when he considered her determination to attend the convention, and in his company.

"To open an old wound hurts, Marcia," he said meekly after awhile. He took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and lit one. Only once before had she seen him smoke a cigarette, and while it amused her now, there was something puzzling about it. How did he happen to have cigarettes on him? He had never carried any before that she knew of. He looked awkward as he smoked, rolling the cigarette with his tongue from side to side between his lips. The smoke veiled his face, irritating his eyes and making them blink. His actions showed he was worried, and it was as if his worrying exalted her. He studied her with perplexity. "Why do you do it, Marcia?" he demanded.

"Do what?"

"Bring up things that would be far better left alone. It's driving me crazy."

The expression of his eyes as he spoke made Marcia realize that this kind of thing could not go on long. She must either stop tantalizing him or prepare to see her home broken up. She was awakened to the realization that her obstinacy was being allowed to pique the good nature of the one she loved the most. Although it was becoming more and more difficult to do, she managed to summon her reason and better judgment to the rescue of the situation.

"Don," she admonished sweetly, "we're quarreling over trivialities—over nothing. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. I am, for I know I've been very unreasonable."

"It takes more than one to make a fight," he admitted a trifle sullenly.

"Unless it were one of those dual-personality monstrosities," she suggested. "But we are neither of us like that, are we?"

They both laughed.

"I've heard that some people fight with themselves," he replied.

"So have I."

And they laughed again.

* * * * *

There had been a week of tranquillity following their verbal encounter. Blake would not allow anything to disturb the equable disposition in which he had schooled himself. Marcia had several times deliberately crossed him to discover if his mood was absolutely impervious, but the experiments failed to enlighten her. His submissive conduct furnished her food for thought. She was surprised to find that the obdurate Blake could be so easily conquered, for she presumed she had done just that, rather to her own discomfiture. Although she had a well-defined aversion for his occasional outbursts of fiery temper, his positive and assertive way of criticizing the things that were not in accord with his ideas, the domination he displayed when he was called on to take the lead, she found all these preferable to his present monotonously submissive mood.

For several days she felt herself the dominating personality in their relationship. Everything Blake did seemed to lack its former force and vividness. This was pure imagination on her part, for there was not a day when Blake vacillated, stood still or retrograded; he was continually advancing. It was only her feeling of resentment that gave her this erroneous impression of his conduct. Although Marcia was looking selfishly into the future, she became acutely conscious of the disaster her own attitude of criticism and dissatisfaction must eventually bring; and by dint of clear thinking, as her better judgment functioned, she saw how utterly unreasonable it was of her to magnify his innocent little faults. When she attempted to compare him with others she was at a loss—there was no comparison, and she knew confidently that he was still the only one in whom she was interested. At times she wondered if she was not the one who was wavering, but she could never fully convince herself of this.

But it was quite evident that the old order of things had vanished. In spite of a willingness on the part of both Blake and Marcia to make concessions, they found that it was impossible to force amiability. When it comes

from the heart it is natural, like hunger; almost involuntary, as far as the will is concerned. This wholesome sweetness of disposition was now lacking in their relationship; that was what they had to contend with from now on. They lived together on an apparently happy basis, though there was an irreparable breach between them, inconsequential enough in the beginning, but insidiously widening, like a vast blow-out in the sand plains that had had its inception in a cow-trod.

It would be folly to assume that neither had had desires and vagrant caprices before this that did not belong strictly within the bonds of matrimony, but until now they had been able to exercise almost complete control over them. Try as they would, they could not recall how to observe the little amenities that make married life a success. Blake was less punctual about coming home after office hours, and if not irritable, not at least in his former frame of amiability when he did come. Marcia was no longer discomfited by his fits of ill-temper; she had learned to meet them with matter-of-fact indifference. Their greetings, perhaps more regularly expressed than formerly, consisted of endearing words that came with a cold, mechanical meaninglessness.

The diversions offered by the Meadow Club became more attractive to Blake; he was spending more time there now than during Marcia's absence while she was campaigning. Because the club had such a lure for him, he and Marcia seldom went out together any more. It was a common occurrence to see them driving away from the house in the evening in separate cars—Marcia now had her own automobile—mutually agreed to fulfill engagements and appointments of an entirely private nature. On several occasions they had met at entertainments, one as ignorant of the other's intention of attending as if they were total strangers. And once they drove home in the same car after one of these chance meetings, forgetting that they had not gone together.

* * * * *

The daily papers were announcing the vanguard of delegates already arriving in the Convention City. Prominent men who were not delegates were also among the

early arrivals. Marcia was in a state of high excitement. She read as much of the accounts to Blake as he would listen to, and he was willing to listen to most of it. Because she had carefully fostered what little concern he had originally shown in the convention, his interest in it had become almost as keen as her own.

The Star gave Marcia favorable mention on the eve of her departure, laying much stress on what she had to say about the probable results.

Mrs. Folsom had also followed the newspaper reports on the convention very closely, but Harry Willets' name was the only one of interest to her in the articles. She was mysteriously exultant each time she saw his name in print, and this exultation reached its climax when, the day before Marcia had planned to leave, Lyman Curtis stopped in Waverly on his way to the convention. Mrs. Folsom telephoned to Marcia.

"Did you know that Mr. Curtis is in town?" she asked.

"I saw him about an hour ago," said Marcia. "He told me he was on his way to the convention."

"So I heard. . . . Have you decided definitely to go tomorrow?"

"Yes. Mr. Curtis is going on the same train. I wish you would make up your mind to come along."

Mrs. Folsom's voice betrayed her eagerness. "Do you think I should?"

"Of course, I do."

"An old schoolmate of mine lives out there. I would like to see her."

"That's reason enough to go," laughed Marcia. "It's a better excuse than I could think of, if I didn't have any business there."

"I suppose Mother could take care of the youngsters," Mrs. Folsom considered. "But she's taken care of them so much I'm afraid people will talk."

"That doesn't sound like you," teased Marcia. "I believe you're going."

"I certainly am," Mrs. Folsom announced her mind as suddenly and emphatically made up.

"Good," commended Marcia.

"I'm coming right over to you to prove I mean it."

It was not long before her electric car appeared around the corner. Marcia did not go out into the street to meet her; she had grown too conventional for that sort of thing. A man preceded Mrs. Folsom from the car, whom Marcia recognized as Lyman Curtis. They came slowly toward the house, admiring the placing of the bird-bath, sun-dial, shrubs and trees.

* * * * * * *

Blake had transacted a great deal of business during the past fortnight. As it happened, this was one of the particular days when he had had an unusually large number of mysterious engagements. Although he professed to be very busy, no one seemed to know just what required his attention so undividedly.

Marcia thought regretfully of Pansy as Mrs. Folsom and Curtis approached. The girl was away on the only vacation she had had since she began working in the Blake household, though she was expected back that evening. Marcia missed her, especially when she had visitors, for guests must not be neglected, and without Pansy to help her, their presence was not particularly convenient just at this time. She wondered how she had managed before she had a maid. Although it was getting late and she had not heard from Blake, she had been going quietly about the work of packing her trunk, refusing to be disturbed by his actions.

Marcia went to the door to greet her friends, offering appropriate excuses for the gingham dress she was wearing. "I'm waiting for Don," she explained. "So please overlook my appearance. He's still busy at the office."

"He is not there," Curtis announced. "I just came from his office. I wanted to talk over a business matter with him and I thought I would find him here. I know he can be depended on to be in one of the two places unless he is unavoidably detained. On my way over I ran across Edna."

Mrs. Folsom looked at Marcia meaningly. The expression in her eyes seemed to say, "Things are not quite what they used to be."

Marcia wished that they were. "He will be home soon. Come in."

Curtis made himself at home, inspecting and commenting on everything new his eyes encountered. He was especially interested in a bronze bust of Marcia that Blake had recently completed. He went to the bookcases and carefully examined the steadily growing library, then turned to look at Marcia, as if comparing her with what the books reflected. He observed that the room held several pieces of new furniture, and that there were two or three pictures on the walls he had not seen before. But all in all he felt one might return a generation hence and recognize the place by its original arrangement.

"Did you say your maid is away?" he asked.

"Yes, she is away," Marcia told him.

He opened the door leading into the maid's room ever so little, and peered in. Something inexplicable had forced him to it. This room was also in its original state; it was a servant's room, occupied by a servant. . . . not what it had been intended for. It was not a children's playroom. Curtis wondered.

Then Blake came home. He bustled into the house, surprised to see Curtis. They shook hands warmly and exchanged greetings.

"Heard you were in town," said Blake. "Was looking for you."

"I came in this afternoon," answered the other. "Won't be here long. Just going through."

"How's tricks?"

A doubtful expression crossed Curtis' face. "We're living in an unsettled time right now," was his evasive reply.

The answer seemed to puzzle Blake, but he did not push Curtis for an explanation. Marcia had gone into the kitchen and Blake followed her.

"I've had my supper," he told her. "You needn't fix anything for me. The President is going through Williston at ten o'clock tonight; he'll make a short address. Let's go down."

Marcia was amazed; was it possible that his political views were in conflict with her own? Or did he want to go merely because he wanted to hear the President of the United States? It occurred to her that she had never

heard him express himself with regard to his political sympathy. She did not even know to what party he belonged, if he belonged to any. She wondered if she knew her husband very well. It also occurred to her that she was not affiliated with her party because it merited her support, but through the influence exerted on her by one glib at soliciting.

"I'll go," she agreed, glad for an opportunity to do something agreeable to him. "Let's hurry."

They joined Mrs. Folsom and Curtis.

"We're going to Williston," Blake informed them.

"I suppose to hear the President?" suggested Curtis.

"Yes."

Curtis scoffed. "He's making a final supreme effort to save himself."

"He doesn't have to do that," disagreed Blake. "He did that long ago."

Marcia took sides with him. "No other President ever had so many delicate situations to deal with. What he has accomplished during his regime is highly commendable."

She excused herself and went to her room to dress. Mrs. Folsom followed, but soon came back, saying, "I must go home and get ready for the trip."

"What trip?" Blake asked.

"I'm going to the convention."

"You are!"

"Uhum. Marcia and I just decided that I should."

"That's fine."

Blake switched on the porch light and accompanied her to the car. When he came back Curtis had turned off the light and was waiting on the steps for him.

"How is Phyllis?" he asked anxiously.

In the dim glow of light that came through the window-hangings, Blake's face betrayed not the least concern or interest in her welfare.

"Oh, she's all right, I guess," he offered carelessly.

"Don't you know?"

Blake lowered his tone to a whisper. "The fact is, I don't know. The last time I heard from her was three or four months ago. . . . She was all right then."

Curtis stirred uneasily, disappointed. "I hoped you could tell me more. That's why I stopped off in Waverly."

Marcia was calling Blake and they went into the house.

Chapter VIII

Mrs. Folsom complained when they left Waverly and she was still complaining when they reached the Convention City. Marcia, too, was irritable. Since she had made a definite advance in unconventional conduct, she found very little in it attractive to her.

"These abominable trains," moaned Mrs. Folsom, "they're a disgrace to American inventive genius. In Europe—"

"Things will be different with a change of administration," Curtis pointed out. "The country has been helpless for a number of years, you know."

Mrs. Folsom retorted testily. "You haven't suffered any! You even obtained your position with the opposition in power. I wish some of our congressmen and senators would contrive as diligently to do something for the general good as they're working for their own interests!"

"I agree with you," Marcia upheld her. "And with Lyman, too. We need a change."

"It'll take time," said Curtis, leaving the way open for retraction. "But it will eventually come. Everything comes to him who waits."

"Sometimes it's a long wait," Marcia gave her version. "Too long."

Mrs. Folsom was not to be placated. "Always procrastinating!" she accused. "You've done it so long that it's become a habit with you."

He merely chuckled.

"He thinks we're novices. Well, maybe he's right." This from Marcia.

"I know the thoughts of his kind," continued Mrs. Folsom. "Tom is the same way. That's why I'm here under protest."

"You poor thing," sympathized Curtis.

He had heard so much of this sort of thing that it was becoming wearisome. At first she had criticized Folsom

in such a clever manner that she was interesting, but to her companions, as she continued to refer to him with disrespectful regularity, her trite bitterness became a bore.

While Mrs. Folsom continued to lament, Marcia became interested in a band that was playing on a balcony inside the newly-constructed Union Station. The thing that attracted her most was the unnecessarily great volume of music it was producing. She wondered if the men played continuously with that same ardor, or if their efforts were regulated by the arrival of delegation trains. All in all, whichever it was, it was about the convention that this hilarity centered.

"O-o-o-h, that music," she exclaimed with girlish enthusiasm. "That's great."

Mrs. Folsom's opinion differed. "It drives me mad!" she said. "Let us hurry and get away from here."

"We'll have to wait for Lyman."

"I suppose it will take him forever and a day doing that errand for me."

Because Mrs. Folsom had insisted on it, Curtis was on his way to arrange to have her baggage sent to the hotel where they had made reservations.

Marcia looked after him. "He's handy to have along."

"He's a tyrant," declared Mrs. Folsom. Then, glaring at the bandmaster as he instilled new zeal into his musicians, she added, "He irritates me, terribly!"

"Who? The band leader?"

"Well, he does, too. But I mean Lyman. I gave him my trunk checks on the train and he turned them over to that greasy looking fellow that came along through the Pullman. He didn't know the man from Adam! Think of him giving my property into the hands of a stranger! I've probably seen the last of my trunks!"

Marcia refused to believe that her companion was worrying as much as she pretended. "You don't like Lyman, do you?" she inquired curiously.

"That isn't all. . . . I detest him."

"You don't, either."

"Yes, I do. He meddles too much. He forms opinions on matters that shouldn't concern him."

"Does he?"

"He certainly does."

"What did he say?"

"He said Tom was probably right when he objected to my coming here."

Marcia laughed. "You'll admit the truth of that yourself."

"Not me! I never concur with an opinion that puts me in the wrong."

"Well," considered Marcia, "even if he was right, that doesn't mean it was wrong for you to come."

"Well," retorted Mrs. Folsom, "neither would you be here if husbands had their way."

"I'll admit," said Marcia, reminiscently, "that Don was right when he objected."

Because she was still cross, Mrs. Folsom suddenly saw the situation in a peculiar light, believing that she had arrived at the solution of a deep mystery. Finding it necessary to have an outlet for her ruffled feelings, she proceeded to tantalize Marcia.

"I hope I'm not intruding," she said meaningly. "If I had known that you and Mr. Curtis had planned—"

"Edna, why you silly thing!" Marcia cut her short.

"The truth hurts, doesn't it, dear?" her friend continued sweetly. "Why didn't you let me know that I was—a—was trespassing? I could have made the trip alone."

But Marcia was growing wiser in this game of wits. "Then I wish I hadn't invited you to come along."

"Business of my own brought me here, my dear. Your invitation had nothing to do with my coming," Mrs. Folsom assured her.

Marcia thought it was time to disclose the fact that she was not entirely stupid in regard to her companion's activities. "I understand that you are here to cover certain phases of the convention for a newspaper."

Mrs. Folsom saw Curtis coming toward them far down the large waiting-room, and she asked quickly, "Where did you get your information?"

Marcia laughed. "It's your turn to puzzle a little."

"I don't have to. I know who told you."

"I'm glad you do. It will save me the trouble of an explanation."

"Did Lyman tell you?"

"How well you guess!"

"Lyman Curtis! Really! So he told you?"

Marcia enjoyed Mrs. Folsom's confusion. Never before had she known there was so much satisfaction in turning the tables, having always been too modest to attempt anything of the sort. The unsophisticated girl, for whom Mrs. Folsom had felt sorry, thinking she would be swamped at the convention, was suddenly showing a resourcefulness capable of carrying her through. She admired her.

"Anyway," she said, "Lyman is up to big things. No wonder I hate him! Mr. Folsom doesn't even know the nature of my business here. That is why he objected to my coming. He couldn't understand—"

"Why should Edith Dunbar waste her time reporting a convention?" Marcia broke in, thinking Mrs. Folsom was about to fabricate a story she must eventually retract. "I don't blame him."

Mrs. Folsom pretended to be undisturbed by what had been said. "Unless you tell me more," she said calmly, "you'll leave me greatly puzzled."

"I'm surprised that Edith Dunbar, the remarkable and prolific writer, should profess such dullness."

"Did he tell you that, too?"

"Yes, he told me all about you," Marcia admitted. "Long ago. But I kept it to myself as long as I could—until I found it necessary to resort to it to defend myself."

"Did he tell you also that he is not my cousin?"

"He didn't say anything about that."

Mrs. Folsom turned her back to conceal her indignation when she thought Curtis was approaching them. A moment later she looked for him over her shoulder, observing with satisfaction that he had stopped at a news and cigar stand nearby to purchase a magazine. He had already engaged the girl in charge in earnest conversation.

"I don't care how much he told you," she went on, presuming Curtis was at a safe distance. "You don't know

the half of it. But I'm going to tell you some startling things myself. Mr. Folsom was destitute when I married him. And so was I. When we became acquainted at an editors' ball in the city where I was employed, he was a country editor and I a reporter, receiving fifteen dollars a week. But we were ambitious and full of optimism. We were married and came West. . . . and we made good. But we had a great many discouraging experiences before we were certain of three meals a day and a bed to sleep on. I even told fortunes one Summer when I was supposed to be convalescing at a health resort after a surgical operation. In that way I made money enough to pay the surgeon and the hospital. And I never did break the habit of making money. Mr. Folsom thinks I've discontinued that kind of work—newspaper writing. He insisted that I must. That is why I write under a pseudonym."

Marcia sensed a deeper mystery. "How is it that Lyman knows so much about your affairs?" she asked. "You will pardon me for being inquisitive but I'd like to know that, too—since you've confided this much in me."

"I'm glad you asked that. I've wanted to tell you about it for ever so long. Lyman is the one who made it possible to have my first story published. He was attending Harvard at the time and he influenced a Boston publisher, a close friend of his, to purchase my story outright. You see, I owe a great share of my success to him."

During the brief silence that followed, the two women gazed in the direction of the news stand, where Curtis was still talking with the clerk.

"And then you say you hate him," said Marcia, wonderingly.

"Oh, well, you know *how* I hate him. Sometimes I think he's the most wonderful man that ever lived!"

Marcia indulged in a casual survey of her companion; then she turned and looked abstractedly in Curtis' direction, wondering what there was about him that was so infinitely attractive. The girl behind the counter was apparently absorbed in turning the leaves of a pamphlet, and he was bending closely over her. Several customers were

waiting, but she seemed oblivious to them. How had he succeeded in fascinating her so quickly and so completely? This was all very mysterious, just as it was when he and Marcia had been sweethearts and their relationship on the verge of consummating in marriage. She thought she cared for him then, now she knew positively that she had been mistaken.

"He's the most wonderful man that ever lived." The phrase was echoing and re-echoing in her mind. Then this thought was displaced by the other Mrs. Folsom had employed: "You know how I hate him." And he was not her cousin. They were not even related. Very disconcerting! Marcia's thoughts swung back to before her marriage. "How unconsciously fortunate I was," she mused.

Mrs. Folsom was growing impatient. She glanced frowningly in the direction of Curtis as he continued to show an interest in the news stand girl.

"He's coming," said Marcia.

"Blame me for everything," said Curtis, when he observed Mrs. Folsom's stormy look. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting. The girl at the news stand is the daughter of the widow at whose home I boarded when I went to school," he continued. "I was glad to see her. She was just a little tad then, but she remembered me."

"An old acquaintance, to be sure," said Mrs. Folsom, with a nod at Marcia. "How many of those do you expect to meet here?"

"None, that I know of," said he, reaching for Mrs. Folsom's handbag. Then he added, "that is, I haven't arranged for anything of that sort."

* * * * *

Everything that transpired in the Convention City had a thrill in it for Marcia; she had received her first surprise when she walked through the subterranean portion of the depot, which led from the train shed to the waiting room above. It was a revelation to see how well architectural ingenuity had succeeded in planning the handling of a steadily flowing multitude of people. When she beheld the size of the structure, the labyrinth of stairs and passages, in itself embodying most of the conveniences

of a city, she mentally bewailed the break she had allowed to occur in her political career. For was it not politics that had opened her eyes? Then, while they were waiting for Curtis, she endeavored to form an estimate of the amount of money required to erect the building, for she was beginning to credit the potency of money with power to achieve anything.

A little later, when they were awaiting their turn to be taken uptown, Marcia was astonished at the number of vehicles that rolled up and discharged passengers. Some hastened off in even greater haste than they arrived, while others took their places with myriads of others lined up in a side street, apparently in an endless line of idleness.

She wondered if these sights amazed her companions as much as they did her. When they appeared as commonplace to them as the lawn and sun dial at home were to her, the consciousness of her provincialism dulled her enthusiasm. She realized how limited her worldly experience was, and how far she had to go before she could hope to accomplish really great things.

Although she had traveled extensively with her father and mother when she was quite young, it had been in a cramped and meagre way. When she tried to recall some pleasant things in connection with these journeys, she found the thing that had made the most indelible impression on her mind was her father's continually inquiring as to the "most reasonable priced hotel" at their next stop.

Since her marriage Marcia had traveled very little with Blake. It had apparently never entered his mind to take her along when he attended medical conventions, nor had she ever presumed to show a desire to accompany him. Their honeymoon trip and an annual jaunt to Lake Lashaway had been the most important of their travels together, which she realized had not greatly improved on her girlhood experiences. A feeling of distress and discouragement surged through her; it made her wish she had not come.

On their way uptown Marcia was seized with a sense of horror as each minute brought her nearer to the time when she was to appear before the convention, when she was to show the kind of clay she was made of. Because

of her ignorance regarding the qualifications of a national convention delegate she feared that she might be incapable of performing the duties she had been entrusted with. The uneasiness over this made her breathing labored. She hoped her distress was escaping the attention of her companions, though she had observed Curtis watching her curiously. But at the hotel she was considerably relieved. There she found several men of note she had met during her first political experience. These and some from her own state, whom she knew well enough to inspire her with confidence, made her forget her former fears.

Curtis, always on the alert to do anything likely to give either Marcia or Mrs. Folsom a feeling of comfort and security, made them acquainted with all of his cronies he encountered about the hotel. Even some of the most dignified and important of these indicated they had heard about Marcia; but Mrs. Folsom was unknown—so it seemed. This encouraged Marcia further, and when she found that she was accorded more than ordinary courtesy and consideration, she was emboldened to be glad she was there.

On the afternoon of their arrival, Curtis accompanied Marcia to the convention hall for her first taste of something real in the way of politics. The committee for seating delegates was so pompously busy that its action frightened her. Though she was not adverse to spectacular displays, she felt that the men on this committee had an exaggerated opinion of their importance. It seemed as if the very atmosphere was surcharged with trouble for her. But when her credentials were examined and she was seated without a protest, she was once more glad that she had come.

A tour of the city followed, Curtis again accompanying her. It seemed as if all regular business had been suspended to bid welcome and give undivided attention to the comfort of the throng of delegates. The city was celebrating, having triumphed over an ancient rival in securing the convention and gaining the consequent coveted publicity. The streets were filled with a moving sea of humanity. The happy melee reminded Marcia of carnival crowds in Williston when she was a girl. She always had a com-

parison for everything she saw, but this vast multitude differed with her ready analogy in that it was almost entirely made up of distinguished looking people.

Finally they engaged a motor making a specialty of boulevard drives. The driver knew his business and it was not long before they emerged from the congested section and they were racing along the "avenue beautiful" of the city. Marcia felt comfortable in the luxurious, finely appointed conveyance, its engine working with the smoothness and quietness of a long, soft sigh. Their speeding was not hindered by surface cars and other slow-moving vehicles, because it was here that speed and grace reigned, and a dilatory pace would have been out of place.

The broad boulevard was divided by a park of trees and shrubs and flowers making it an ideal place for people with the time and means to indulge in idleness. Though never without the whirling sound of motor cars, the boulevard rapidly filled to its capacity an hour before dusk, when the speed became less terrific and the commoner was permitted to observe fashion in all its glory.

When Marcia and Curtis had turned into it it was yet several hours before the aristocracy would take possession, but there was so much else for her to marvel at she was kept almost too busy. She watched the enclosed cars as they darted past. Their occupants all seemed to Marcia very distinguished men and women, possibly because they were so apparently oblivious to their surroundings. She wondered if she looked the same to them, or if they noticed her at all. Perhaps they were delegates from a neighboring district back home, and it was the changed environment that gave them the air that so amazed her. Then she had it: they gave her this impression merely because they were strangers to her. She remembered having met people at home who awed her until she became acquainted with them, when she found them ordinary enough.

Marcia looked at Curtis when he yawned widely and stretched. "You seem to be making hard work of this trip," she accused. "If I'd known you were as tired as that I wouldn't have asked you to come along."

"That ride on the train was tiresome," he replied, straightening himself. Then he added admiringly, "You've got more energy than any other person I know. If I had it I'd be encouraged to tackle almost anything."

"Flatterer!"

"No, honest."

And he yawned again.

"Please wake up."

"I can't understand what's the matter with me!" he sputtered, shaking himself. "I'm kind of groggy."

"Throw away the chloroform," she suggested.

"I guess I'm subconsciously resting up for the big work tomorrow."

"Well," advised Marcia, "think of me."

"We're here on two very different missions," he reminded her. "My bread and butter depends on the outcome here, while you have nothing at stake regardless of how the convention goes."

It became yet a little clearer to her why so many people had succeeded in impressing her favorably. They were masquerading, and their air of importance was merely a sham. If anyone as shallow as Lyman Curtis could feel as important as he did, she should have seen more of it than she had.

"Some people exist on trifles and think they're accomplishing something," she said, annoyed.

He considered. "This is work for me in the same way that sheep feeding is to Doctor Blake."

Marcia stared at him. "That's not Don's business," she contradicted. "It's just a hobby of his!"

"He's making money out of it!"

"I believe he is. In fact, I know he is. I'd want him to stop if he weren't. Even hobbies should be handled in such a way as to make them profitable."

Marcia was defending Blake in all earnestness. It was what Curtis wanted; not that he was especially pleased to know that she and her husband were in perfect accord, for he had secretly hoped they were not; but since they were, he wanted to know it. He had been almost certain some little dissension had come between them. Since Marcia's marriage he was devoting a great deal of time to studying

the family affairs of his married friends. The Blakes in particular were under his surveillance, and Marcia's defense of Blake had cleared up what had been problematical in his mind. It was, as it were, acting as a guide to his ever-covetous designs on Marcia. He was the sort of a bad loser whose wounds refuse to heal even with the aid of time, and Marcia's indication that she was not lamenting over her mistake, if she had made one, made him turn away resolutely, content to let time continue to fight his battle.

"O-o-o-o-f," he groaned, when the car swerved and came to a sudden stop as the driver clamped on the brakes in obedience to the signal of an obdurate traffic officer. He put his hand to the side of his head where he had bumped it, saying, "If I'd been killed I'd be sorry for what I said to you."

Marcia laughed. "Then I wish you'd been killed."

"I mean it," he said seriously. "I am sorry."

She looked at him. Her lips parted as if she were about to speak again, when the car lunged forward and came to an abrupt stop in front of their hotel.

* . * * * * *

Immediately after luncheon the following day, Marcia and Curtis proceeded to the *Coliseum* where the preliminaries of the convention were in progress. Mrs. Folsom failed to accompany them, a severe headache being her excuse for remaining in her room. Marcia believed her in the same way that she had believed her on various other occasions, for she always had plans of her own when she expressed a desire to be left alone. Marcia wondered what Mrs. Folsom's program was for the afternoon.

But when they arrived at the *Coliseum* she forgot about her companion, herself, Waverly, Blake, everything, in fact—the emotional weight of the great gathering swept her off her feet. Here, at last, she was among a multitude of people who had the destiny of the country in their hands.

They were no longer stiff-backed and stupidly formal. The contrast between their attitudes of today and yesterday was almost unbelievable.

Then she received her first shock, and came back to

earth. Although she had met many people of minor importance, she had yet to become acquainted with any of those who possessed real influence in the convention. One of the first of these she was introduced to was Senator Soulsberry from Vermont. He was a distinguished looking gentleman with white hair and a silken-smooth face, on which was a scattering of indistinct rust-like blotches that contrasted beautifully with the delicate skin. He was supposed to be wearing pince-nez, but he carried them, for the most part, on the end of his left thumb, and on the very point of his long, slender nose when it was necessary to use them to facilitate his vision.

Marcia's heart beat violently when the venerable man, who was already being mentioned as a possible dark horse, pressed her hand with significant firmness. He was from Vermont—from that wonderful state that had within its borders the Green Mountains, those wondrous hills where her mother had been born and of which she had spoken so often. Soulsberry was still holding her hand while her memory raced back to her school days, when she had studied geography and formed vivid mental pictures of those mountains and the marvelous, moss-hung trees with which they were cloaked. Even though she was only a child, she had hopes of some day climbing the mountains her mother had climbed, and of romping through the valleys where she had played. And here she was face to face with someone who had lived there all his life—like her mother, a native of Vermont.

"Was I right when I understood that you are from Waverly?" asked Soulsberry; then, adjusting his pince-nez ridiculously near the end of his nose, he repeated, "Waverly? Waverly? Let me see. What is it I'm associating that name with. Oh, yes! I have it. Scott's novels. I'm a real admirer of Sir Walter. Waverly is a splendid name for a town. Tell me, what state is it in? I suppose it is really an unimportant little village like we have up in the mountains, but some very good people are liable to come from places like that."

Marcia's heart seemed to drop to the most remote part of her chest, and with its descent, exploded her bubble of admiration for the man from the state she had loved so

deeply and inexplicably since childhood. She hesitated before she answered him, for her mind refused to construct a sentence. The shock of this man telling the haughty Marcia how unimportant she was, though she had been uncomfortably aware of it for some time, was almost beyond endurance. He had probably done it unconsciously, but he had done it effectively. The name Waverly must in the future become a shibboleth for those who aspired to a political career.

“Why, Waverly is—”

She paused helplessly, still unable to convince even herself that important people might come from obscure localities. She welcomed an impolite interruption on the part of Soulsberry's secretary, who rudely brushed her aside and thrust several telegrams into the extended hand of his employer. The man from Vermont excused himself and read the telegrams. Then he excused himself again and started away, saying, “I will see you again, Mrs. Blake. There is one thing in particular I want to speak to you about.”

Marcia's gaze followed him.

* * * * *

When Marcia reached her hotel that evening she thought over the proceedings of the day with the utmost satisfaction, though she had sustained several disappointments. She permitted herself to believe that she had taken a long step toward securing for Waverly what she had promised it.

Before going to her room, where she expected to find Mrs. Folsom, she stopped on the mezzanine floor to write a letter to Blake. It was here that she saw Mrs. Folsom, seated in such a way as to hide her face from the direct view of anyone passing that way, while all that was visible of a man by her side was a generous tuft of grey and reddish hair protruding above the back of the chair in which he was seated. Mrs. Folsom was apparently too deeply engrossed in conversation with the man to notice Marcia. There was a constant drone of conversation from their direction. Marcia became curious, and did a little eavesdropping by seating herself at a writing desk near

them. Mrs. Folsom was doing most of the talking, the man seldom finding occasion to answer her.

When Marcia found she could catch nothing that was being said, she began to write, all the while feeling a sensation of recognition for someone other than Mrs. Folsom. It must be the man. She continued to write, barely able to collect her thoughts enough to do so. The side of her face from which the disturbing sensation came, flushed and her ear burned. Her hand trembled and her nervous fingers perspired, making the penholder glisten with moisture. As she got up to leave, her sidewise glance caught Mrs. Folsom's.

"Oh, Marcia," she called, rising, "look who is here!"

The tuft of reddish hair sank out of sight and then came up over the back of the chair as if by rebound. Harry Willets had undoubled his six-foot frame and came toward Marcia.

"I declare," he greeted her, employing his favorite expression, "it's mighty good to see you here."

Marcia said simply, "You seem surprised."

"Yes, a little," he said uncertainly. "I thought you were out of politics."

"Didn't you know I was here?"

"Well, yes. Mrs. Folsom told me you were. I want to congratulate you on your achievement."

"It's hardly worthy of that. It was so easily accomplished," Marcia assured him. "Too easy, I think, to make me appreciate it the way I should."

"I wish I could feel that way," he prevaricated, for he thought nobody worked with less effort than he did. "It must be a great pleasure to accomplish your work with the ease that you do."

"Don't call it work," she remonstrated. "Please don't! I rebuked Mr. Curtis this morning when he referred to it in that way. And your own feat of becoming national chairman!"

"Is Lyman in the hotel?" asked Willets, ignoring her reference to his achievement.

"He went to his room to dress for dinner."

"I've been waiting for a chance to see him." He picked up his cane, an acquisition since the automobile accident,

bracing himself on it. "Three years don't bring care-lines to a skin like yours, Marcia," he flattered. "You haven't changed a single iota."

She considered a moment. "It is three years since the last time we met." Then she thought he was either mistaken or was just flattering. "Some people are poor observers," she added. "I've gained ten pounds."

"Well, I did notice that, too," he retorted. "I was about to remark that the few extra pounds you've picked up have rounded you out nicely."

Marcia frowned as she perceived an appraising gleam in his eye. It was evident he had changed if she had not. There was no noticeable physical change in him except that his hair was slightly more gray, but she had never known him to be carelessly familiar before. She wanted to hurry away before saying something she might regret. She looked at the clock on the wall across the court.

"We had better go and dress for dinner, Edna," she suggested. "You always need plenty of time, you know."

"I don't feel well enough to devote much time to that tonight," Mrs. Folsom protested. "I'll go the way I am."

Then Marcia observed that her friend was already attired for dinner, and that she obviously had not intended waiting for her.

"I expected to find you in our room—still feeling indisposed," Marcia suggested.

Mrs. Folsom seemed confused. "Oh, I began feeling better soon after you left."

"Edna has promised to have dinner with me," Willets interposed, "and I'm inviting you and Lyman to come with us."

"Yes, do," urged Mrs. Folsom.

Marcia had turned to leave them. She stopped, about to accept, but she had instantly weighed the situation and hesitated.

"If you're otherwise engaged," said Willets, "don't let me interfere."

"I'm not," replied Marcia.

"Then come along."

"It'll be a little while before I can get ready. Will you wait for me?"

"Surely."

"We're in no hurry," Mrs. Folsom informed her.

"I have a little business transaction with Lyman, anyway," said Willets, which was his way of compelling Mrs. Folsom to accompany Marcia to their room, for he had decided that this was necessary to avoid friction between them. "I'm going down to the lobby to wait for him."

The two women proceeded toward the elevator.

* * * * *

In their room while Marcia was dressing, Mrs. Folsom talked volubly of her visit with Willets. Marcia listened intently and quietly. For some reason she was very deliberate about everything she did. Then, suddenly, she knew that Harry Willets was not a mere memory to her. Retrospection had revived her intense interest in him, even more profoundly than anything she had been conscious of during their association in campaign work. Continuing to dress slowly, she fought desperately the disquieting thought that he had the slightest influence over her, endeavoring to calm herself by assuming it was the accident and the consequent mutual suffering they had endured that provoked these disquieting tender recollections.

Deliberately comparing the present Harry Willets with the one she had known three years ago, she felt that she was capable today of discerning his true self—a carefree bachelor who was shirking the responsibility for which he was intended. But instantly she wondered if he was as bad as that. She had difficulty arriving at a definite decision, vaguely excusing him on the assumption that he was moving warily and would fulfill his obligations when he found the person he wanted. A fearful feeling came over her that convinced her of an uncertainty in her own mind—one that was liable to deceive her. So, to prove to her own satisfaction that there was nothing equivocal about her determination of not approving him, she resorted to the world old custom of declaring herself.

"Haven't you observed a change in Mr. Willets?" she asked, as a way of getting at her purpose. "I don't know what it is, but somehow he seems different."

"Dear me, I don't think he has changed. If he has, I've failed to notice it," Mrs. Folsom replied.

"I have," Marcia stated emphatically. "It seems to me he's grown unpardonably careless in many ways. And you know I didn't think that the last time I saw him."

Mrs. Folsom did not know how to take this. "What reason have you to say that?"

"You heard what he said to me."

"Yes, I remember. At the time I let it pass as just another of the clever things he's always saying; but I can understand the way you took it. I don't blame you for being resentful." She seemed suddenly to come to life. "Come to think of it, there is something peculiar about him," she continued. "I wish that I used my eyes as well as you do yours. You involuntarily see things; you didn't have to study him closely to tell that his mouth and eyes betrayed something. I can see it now, after you point it out. I believe you're right, Marcia; he has changed—and not for the better."

Marcia paused abruptly, lip stick poised in mid-air; then she laid the stick on the table and turned about defiantly. What Mrs. Folsom had said was unquestionably so, but Marcia's instinct swayed her reason to defend the man. "You are too sweeping in your opinion—I hate opinions of that kind."

And Mrs. Folsom thereby gained some much desired information.

"Oh, well," she shrugged indifferently, as if tired of the subject.

Marcia was in a quandary. She found herself suddenly idolizing this man, and still she wanted to detest him. Mrs. Folsom's attitude made her miserable. She flung back her head and busied herself with cosmetics, her mental anguish nearly dazing her; the final touches of her toilet were accomplished almost mechanically. The harder she had tried to put Willets out of her mind the more persistently he remained; the thing tormented her, and when she eventually turned to her companion and said she was ready to go down, her face was clouded and her eyes blazing.

"Come," she urged, "I've kept you waiting long enough."

Mrs. Folsom got up and followed her, humming a tune that came to her mind whenever she was amused.

* * * * *

Willets and Curtis were seated near the elevator when they got down.

"Have you thought of a place where you would care to dine?" asked Willets, speaking to no one in particular.

Marcia looked at Mrs. Folsom, as much as to say, "What suits you will suit me."

Willets was either hungry or nervous. "Where shall we go?" he demanded, fidgeting.

"Any place," said Mrs. Folsom. "We're strangers here, you know. Nobody will know us even if we do act wild and out of place."

Curtis forced a laugh.

"Yes, we're strangers," Willets agreed. "I'm glad of it. On a stifling night like this I'd suggest the roof-garden at the *St. Regis*."

Curtis was never in perfect accord with anything or anybody.

"I detest the *St. Regis Garden*," he complained.

"Well, let's go up above—here."

"With this crowd the service isn't what it should be," Curtis objected again. "Let's try the *Menhadden*."

"Oh, yes! I want to go there. I've been hearing about that place for years," Mrs. Folsom concurred enthusiastically.

Willets settled the question. "All right, we'll go there."

They walked to the street and Willets helped Marcia and then Mrs. Folsom into a taxi. Curtis gave the chauffeur directions, and they were whisked away into the thickening dusk. Marcia had remained unusually silent since joining the men, but when Curtis looked at her questioningly, her lips curved into a dazzling smile. Curtis returned the smile, saying, "If you look like that tomorrow you'll turn the convention into a riot."

She managed a cool laugh. Then she wondered if he had said it because he really admired her.

"You mean they'll be afraid of me?" she fenced.

"You know what I mean."

She laughed again, this time more genuinely. "You've

not changed in the least," she protested. "Not a bit. You're the same old flatterer."

When they arrived at the *Menhadden*, not more than two blocks from their hotel, Willets helped Marcia from the car. Mrs. Folsom followed, clinging possessively to Willets' arm and walking up the several steps with him. Curtis, regarding the place critically, was not inclined to follow them too closely.

"Come on," urged Marcia. "We've had criticism enough from you."

"I don't know about this place, either," he demurred. And he looked sharply to either side, as if the unexpected was about to happen.

But they went on up and in, Marcia finding almost too much food for thought in the amazingness of the environment in which she now found herself. Perhaps it was her puritanical blood that revolted so violently when she saw old Judge Wray, of Williston, an intimate friend of the family, seated at a table with a woman of questionable appearance. Although she almost brushed his elbow in passing, he failed to notice her—intentionally. Men and women were slinking toward private booths without looking to either side, the gaiety derived obviously counterbalanced by the misery they would inevitably bring upon themselves later. Marcia's back was almost against the telephone booth, and she could momentarily hear the waiter informing someone "the coast is clear for number eleven," or for whatever other number the coast had been cleared.

She was suddenly conscious of eyes bent intently on her. She turned her head—casually. A man continued to stare at her after she had singled him out. Instantly he had interpreted her gaze as an indication that she would receive him if he was bold enough to make the advance, and, continuing to stare, he smiled and bent his head in a slow nod. She smiled, just a little, turned and became interested in what Curtis was saying about the convention. Then, more intensely than before, she felt the strange, magnetic pull of those burning eyes. Being so far away from home, amid strange and exciting surroundings, such an incident is likely to breed indiscretion; and still some-

what provoked because of the influence Willets had over her, she could think of no reason for resenting the strange man's actions. She rather enjoyed the sensation of being the object of such attention, and invited more by casting another look in his direction. These two brief glances were sufficient to convince her that his personality was pleasing enough to make her anxious to gain his acquaintance.

Then she came to her senses, wondering if this apparently well-regulated place was in reality a rendezvous for just such people as he. A few years ago an experience of this kind would have filled her with utter disgust, but she had rapidly developed an understanding of the ways of the world. Moreover, she was genuinely anxious to know who the strange man was. She was almost certain she had seen him at the convention that afternoon. Probably he was a man high up in politics; if so, his position justified her inclination to become acquainted with him—a desirable addition to the trophies she was collecting.

The man settled with his waiter and rather hesitantly directed his footsteps toward their table; he paused for the briefest instant at Curtis' chair, his lips parting as if about to speak, only to move on when the latter ignored him.

"Who is that man?" Marcia tried to speak casually.

Curtis looked intentionally in the wrong direction. "Which one?"

Marcia nodded. "That one over there. He stopped an instant by your chair as he passed, you know."

Curtis' gaze followed the man. "You don't want to know who he is."

"I do, too!" Marcia pouted.

"You'll be sorry if you do!"

"Why?"

"He's a notorious character around Washington."

"Then you know him?"

"That is why I didn't care to recognize him. I know him too well."

"And you think it is wrong for me to know the people that you know?"

"Good heavens! Can't you understand what I'm trying to make clear to you?"

"I understand perfectly," returned Marcia. "It seems to me you've suddenly become sort of chaperonish. I merely asked you to tell me who he is."

"And I merely won't tell you!"

"Just because you are obstinate," she laughed. "But you're not hurting me by refusing."

"I saw him smiling at you," he accused, "and you smiled back at him. I know you wouldn't have done it if you'd known who he was."

"Oh," she exclaimed in surprise. "Then you were watching us?"

Curtis looked wise. "Very little escapes me," he boasted. "So be careful, innocent one!"

"I refuse to be innocent any longer," she informed him airily. "I've thrown away my fool's cap."

"Talking seriously, Marcia," Curtis insisted, "you're too fine to begin taking life lightly."

She felt guilty and tried to clear herself. "When he smiled I thought he knew who I—"

"That's his game," broke in Curtis. "He is bold enough to take a chance on not being rebuffed; and he is low enough to feel he has risked nothing when he doesn't get away with it."

At first Mrs. Folsom and Willets had found amusement in listening to the dialogue, but they began to feel awkward when it threatened to develop into a serious discussion. Two men stopped at their table to speak to Willets. One of them recognized Marcia, and because she had no recollection of having met the man, she regarded this as an indication that she was making a favorable impression.

"You are from Waverly," suggested the man, indicating he remembered something in connection with her. "Are you not?"

Marcia assented pleasantly.

"One of the farmer delegates from—from what state? I should remember that, too."

Marcia felt her exhilaration ebbing. Willets was aware of her discomfiture and relieved her by saying, "She comes from the best state of all . . . my own."

This pleased her, prohibiting any further reference to the unimportance of herself and Waverly. The waiter brought their dinner and all during the meal, while people were wending their way to and fro past them, the national chairman was the center of attraction. Apparently everybody was in some way connected with the convention.

* * * * *

At the convention Marcia worked hard for recognition. Primarily through her own efforts, she succeeded in being placed on a minor committee. However, Willets did everything he could for her when he realized what she was working for, although she was not aware of it; the workings of politics were still too intricate for her to have even the remotest knowledge of how political positions were distributed. But she could feel the boost she had received from some powerful source, and she vaguely presumed it had come through Willets, and was properly grateful and admiring of his skill and prestige.

As a committee member Marcia was a success. After a short but hot conflict she was made chairman of the committee on which she served, believing all the while that she had accomplished this without assistance. She was too much of a novice in political affairs to understand that she had received help from Willets until he casually spoke to her about it, disconcerting her, for now she could not point to a single thing as her own accomplishment. Nevertheless, she felt confident some progress was being made—at least, the task of beginning had been overcome.

She was the first woman delegate, through prearrangement with Willets, to be given the floor to make some announcement in the interest of the committee she had in charge. When she arose the big hall resounded with applause of recognition; and as she stood there, smiling, nervous, and yet strangely assured, a glow seemed to envelop the rostrum on which Willets was seated. To her he had become superhuman, almost sublime. He had inspired her with confidence in his power by feeding her on the belief that he had practically accomplished the impossible for her, when, in fact, he had done nothing more than to take care of his own interests.

Chapter IX

In the meantime Blake was unable, try as he would, to keep his mind from dwelling constantly on Marcia. Whether at the operating table in the hospital, examining a patient in his office, or out on business connected with his sheep-raising venture, he was constantly thinking of her. The weight of his grief over her absence was making his work a grilling grind, performed without the dexterity and completeness that had characterized it heretofore. However fully his mind was occupied, he had visions of Marcia standing before the convention, heedless and happy, receiving the plaudits of that great group of people. Marcia making acquaintances that were never to be forgotten, with people who did not stop to consider that they were enhancing their own pleasure at his expense. Marcia having experiences in which there was no part for him. At thoughts such as these he experienced violent twinges of an emotion he diagnosed as jealousy, and although he was provoked at his own lack of control over his feelings, he was glad to know that he still loved his wife above everything. He had been contemplating with horror the possibility that their love might be on the wane, for only recently many trivial matters between them had terminated in gross misunderstandings.

The first two weeks Marcia was away—Marcia and Mrs. Folsom proceeded with the real business of the trip at the conclusion of the convention, raiding several cities known as centers of fashion, touring several states, and finally spending a gay fortnight at a famous summer resort—Blake spent his evenings at home. The Meadow Club had no longer any attraction for him; he wanted to be alone, the way he believed Marcia had intended he should be.

The shy Pansy, by this time as much a part of the household as the lights in the ceiling and the rugs on the floor, was the only one to dispel the feeling of complete

emptiness in the house, for she was never known to go out after dark, and only on the rarest occasions during the day. Blake derived considerable comfort from the knowledge that someone was at least near.

Those first two weeks were dreadful, causing Blake to devote himself more unreservedly than ever before to his surgical practice, and to the steadily increasing business he and Folsom had built up. His hands were particularly full with the latter since Folsom had been stricken with an affliction Blake diagnosed as cirrhosis of the liver. Blake watched the big man pityingly as he realized that his case was hopeless; his once florid face and corpulent body became daily more sallow and bloodless and wasted. It was evident that the end was not far off. So Blake worked the harder to save the ebbing strength of his partner, who refused to follow his instructions to take a rest, as well as keep his own restless and troubled mind occupied.

The realization that he had allowed himself to become jealous of his wife made Blake more dejected and morose than ever. He showed it by an increased severity with his patients, a gruff gloominess in the presence of friends, and a lack of consideration for his colleagues, incensing him further and increasing his melancholy, ultimately driving him to the point of desperation. His keen medical insight warned him that a continuance of his present course could only have a disastrous conclusion; but how could he remedy it? He had never imagined that a person could become so helpless in the grip of his emotions. And in his desperation he censured himself for refusing to accompany Marcia and give her the companionship that marriage purports.

A week after Marcia left, Blake prepared a telegram to send to her, informing her that he was arriving on the first train, but before his secretary had time to reach the telegraph office with the message he telephoned to have it cancelled. He had not been able to convince himself that Marcia was genuinely enthusiastic in her invitation for him to accompany her. Despite the fact that she had repeatedly asked him to make the trip, the issue was definitely settled in his mind when, the evening before she

left, he indicated that he might go along and she had remarked, "Do you really think both of us can afford to be away at the same time?" He had taken this to mean that she had expected him to remain at home after all.

He found that reading was the diversion most congenial to his mood, so he read extensively. The daily papers were devoured to the last word with great zest. Once he found Marcia's name mentioned; he gloated over it and saved the paper. Then reading began to pall on him; he realized that to cram so much matter into his brain without taking time for proper absorption was worse than remaining idle.

His mood called for some tangible activity to which his whole being could respond. It was only natural that the diversion he had always enjoyed should be the one he turned to now, because it was uppermost in his interest—lapidary. He undertook it with much zeal; although he had not attempted this kind of work since carving an ivory geisha girl to replace the one Pansy had broken several years before, he had lost none of his cunning. It even seemed as if he had made astounding progress during his fallow period. He attributed this to the greater stability he had acquired in the performance of tedious tasks through the handling of surgical instruments.

Success begets confidence. Blake installed numerous intricate machines in the basement of his home, and acquired a multitude of tools and other requisites for sculpturing, the cutting of fine stones and the production of ceramics.

"Blake, you've gone plumb crazy!" Folsom exploded when he saw the outlay. "It's pure rot to spend a small fortune on something that'll never bring you a cent in return!"

"I believe in being prepared for the worst," jocosely replied Blake. "Some day I may be unable to practice medicine and surgery and I'll have something to fall back on."

Folsom scowled. "Look here, Blake," he said seriously. "A jest like that is liable to come to a sad realization."

"If it did," Blake remarked, "would you believe my joking had anything to do with it?"

"Figure it out for yourself if it does happen."

Blake retorted quickly. "You know there is such a thing as coincidence."

"How do you mean, coincidence?"

"A remark and an occurrence following one another in such a way as to make them appear connected."

"The thing is this, you're not superstitious."

"I hope you didn't think I was."

"I don't see what harm there'd be in it."

"To be a believer in hoodoos?"

Folsom looked helpless. "What kind of tommyrot are we talking, anyway?"

"Superstition, as I understand it, is the subject."

"Well, I'm not fool enough to worry over anything like that."

"Nor am I. You don't see any luck beans or horse shoes stuck in conspicuous places around here."

Folsom looked relieved. "I thought you were losing confidence in yourself; I'm glad to know you are not."

"You surprise me, Tom."

"I shouldn't," said Folsom, shaking his head sadly. "You've not been yourself lately. I've noticed it for some time, but I couldn't bring myself to speak to you about it until now."

For a few moments the two friends regarded each other in silence; the look that passed between them meant more than words. Then Blake said, "I'm worried, Tom. We never know how little we amount to until we face disaster."

"Disaster!"

"That's what it looks like."

Folsom's sallow face wrinkled into a puzzled frown.

"What the devil is wrong with you, Blake?"

"Haven't you thought of your wife since she left?"

"Who wouldn't?"

"Well, that's my trouble."

"I never have worried over women and I'm getting too old to begin now. The words thinking and worrying have altogether different meanings. Think of what this world would come to if men spent the best part of their lives worrying over women."

"But your *wife*?"

"As long as she doesn't get under my hide I let her have a splendid time of it. If I weren't so damnably incapacitated I'd be doing the same thing."

Blake could only stare at the man dumbfounded. Then he felt a keen pang of envy. A man who was able to solve the problems of life so calmly was not to be envied—he must be admired. However, Folsom was a sick man, on whom serious and trivial matters had about an equal effect.

"So you are satisfied to allow your wife to seek the enjoyment that pleases her?" Blake demanded curiously, watching his business associate, whose hands were shaky and uncertain as he continued to examine pieces of ivory that were in the process of cutting. "Is that what you mean?"

"Of course I do," returned Folsom without looking up. "That's what she went for. I hope she doesn't come home until she feels she can tolerate me again for a month or so."

"Your wife?"

"Sentimentality gets you nothing."

Although this did not express Folsom's views as to their relative position in the affections of their wives, it served to show which way the current of his thoughts was flowing.

"That's why I have gone into this so heavily," Blake explained, waving his hand at the paraphernalia before them. "It keeps my mind more thoroughly occupied than my regular work."

"What are you going to do with these trinkets, anyway?" asked Folsom, turning to some untinted vases and half-finished stones. "Nobody is buying stuff like that nowadays."

"They're not for sale," replied Blake, a strange weakness coming over him. "None of these things can be bought. I'll give some of them to a few of my best friends—if they will accept them. It would be folly to expect anyone to value them very highly for their intrinsic worth but I hope they will be appreciated because they are my handiwork and tokens from me."

Folsom approached a glass-enclosed case and began inspecting a piece of carved ivory, parts of which were cut to an unbelievable fineness. "Uh-huh," he grunted, replacing it and picking up another. "You've got the patience of Job."

Blake smiled sadly.

* * * * *

The following day Blake saw Phyllis for the first time in several months. He had business in the City Hall and she was in the elevator that plied between the first and second floors of the building. At first glimpse he was not certain that it was she. If it was, a marked change had taken place in her features; a girlhood-to-womanhood transformation.

She was crowded into the corner of the small dark cage by several men who had rushed in ahead of him. The single dim light just above the head of the operator did not give a clear outline of her face. A large hat with drooping brim partially obscured her eyes, by which he might have known her. Still wondering if he was right in the possible recognition, he turned his back on those who had preceded him into the elevator; instantly he felt someone touching his elbow. When he looked around he was greeted with a smiling glance from remarkable eyes he could not associate with anyone but Phyllis.

He was surprised at her changed bearing when the elevator stopped and they stepped into the corridor. When her baby was sick with diphtheria, he had observed for the first time that she was pretty; that prettiness had now turned to loveliness. Maternity had given her a pleasing womanliness of bearing; she seemed to have grown taller and was more plump, while sedate beauty had replaced the carelessness and incipience of girlhood.

"How wonderful you look," he said, half under his breath. Then aloud, "I'm surprised to see you—you're looking so well. What are you doing?"

"I'm working for Mr. Garrish, the city surveyor."

"Working!" he echoed, as if the whole notion of work was incompatible with any thought he had of her. "What is the nature of your work?"

"Well," she said, looking toward the room where Mr.

Garrish was seated at his desk, "I've already performed part of my day's labor." She indicated a bundle of parcels and letters she was carrying on her arm. "And I should be busy now. Mr. Garrish is waiting for the morning mail." She excused herself and carried the letters to the man at the desk; the parcels she dropped on a work table, presumably her own. "Then I sweep and dust, file away bills and miscellaneous papers, take dictation and write letters," she continued when she came back. "In fact, I do everything about the office. I like the work. It occupies my mind, and that is when I'm the happiest." She stepped confidently close to him. "It helps me forget the past, Doctor Blake."

Blake alternately pitied and admired her; she seemed pre-eminently able to take care of herself. Apparently she was as carefree as any person he knew. Why should he want to pity anyone who was as satisfied with life as she seemed to be, when he had just battled through a night of discontent? He compared their respective outlooks on life—of today and a few years ago. Such a change! There had come about a complete reversal of conditions, as concerning them, in that time. He could now understand, for the first time in his life, how grief might drive one to contemplate self-destruction.

"I'm glad to see you looking so well and happy," he repeated.

His voice was choked; they were the only words he could find. As she stood there, a veritable picture of health and ambition, the thought occurred to him that all she represented and accomplished in the future the world owed to him. It was not from conceit that he reviewed all he had done for her, but because she seemed now so worthy of life. He was grateful because some unknown force had given him the power to save her. The elation he felt over her happiness was the first he had experienced since Marcia's departure.

"Are you happy, too, Doctor Blake?" she asked abruptly. "I mean, is your life a happy one?"

Embarrassed by the unexpected question, he was slow in answering. "It isn't," he said at length. "I wouldn't tell that to everyone. But I know you well enough to

admit it to you without feeling I'm revealing something I shouldn't."

"I thought—" She paused.

"I hope you don't mind my telling you," he hastened to apologize. "I'm sorry if you didn't care to hear."

Phyllis looked up at him. "Tell me anything you wish," she said, "if it makes it any easier for you."

"Somehow," he replied, "it's a relief to confide in someone."

"I wish I could do more than that for you!"

"You can't."

Then, as if by mutual understanding, they began talking about other things.

* * * * *

Two days later Lyman Curtis stopped at Waverly on his way back from the convention. Although Marcia had written almost daily to Blake since her departure, her husband's first words were, "How was Marcia when you left her?" And with the same breath that gave the answer, Curtis asked, "How is Phyllis?" And it was vividly born in upon them that the world is full of grave perplexities. Its mysteries are not to be understood by man, thereby maintaining his interest at a pitch sufficiently high enough to keep him searching for a solution of the problem. In return for his striving, he receives the pittance that sustains life.

Blake noticed that the information Curtis had gained regarding Phyllis had had a very depressing effect on him. He was miserable with suspense and anxiety over the welfare of the woman he loved and of whose child he was the father, but between them there existed an unfathomed barrier, keeping them from each other with an inexplicable restraint. Why was this? Why should anything occult like this continue through the ages to make the heart of man ache? In the natural order of things he and Phyllis should be together; there was little doubt that they loved each other enough to live happily together, still there was a *something* persistently holding them at a distance. Then Blake thought of his own life—with Marcia. It represented a step further toward supposed perfection through their marriage, but it pained him more

than death itself to think that apparently this bond was not capable of enduring the strain it was under. For he had come to the definite realization that they were drifting apart.

That evening Blake went to Phyllis' house to see how some minor repair work was progressing which he had ordered begun that morning. He had called the evening before to ascertain the extent of the needed repairs, when Phyllis had casually spoken of the paper in the kitchen being soiled and that the baby had chipped the paint from some of the boards in the living room with the stove poker. None of the many houses he owned had ever before received his personal attention when matters as trivial as these were involved.

He stayed late, for there was nobody waiting for him at home except the evanescent Pansy.

"I like this little home," said Phyllis, preparing a lunch of gingerbread, preserves and coffee. "Will you sell it to me?"

"I'll be glad to do that." He paused to do a little calculating. Then he added, "I'll make it easy for you—on the rental plan."

"I don't want you to go out of the way for me," she stated. "This is going to be a real business deal."

"All right," he agreed. "What is your proposition?"

"How much do you want?"

Blake seemed to have the figures on the end of his tongue. "Fifteen hundred dollars, furnished and including the rent that's due me."

"How much cash will the deal require?"

"That is really immaterial as far as I'm concerned," he said. "Any amount you can pay down will be satisfactory."

"Will eight hundred dollars be enough?"

Blake was astounded. He was a shrewd business man, but it was beyond him to figure how she could save that much money after providing for herself and her little family.

"Won't that strap you?" he demanded, puzzled.

"Not quite," she told him, securing her check book. "Of course, it's going to leave me only a small balance,"

she added after consulting the figures. "But I can pay you at least that much."

"Probably you'd better not go so strong."

"I've had this thing in mind for some time," she explained. "I know just what I can do."

"The place is yours without further arguing," he stated. "It's yours."

She wrote a check and gave it to him. He studied the writing for a full minute, then held it mechanically over a small lamp to dry it, holding it so close to the flame that it seemed as if he intended to burn it. From the lamp his gaze moved slowly about the room, resting on the few pieces of furniture it contained.

"And are you happy here?" he asked.

"I could live in a hovel and be happy with my baby and Gracie. The baby is so sweet and Gracie is a wonderful help."

Blake tried to conjure something—but his imagination failed him.

* * * * *

Folsom's health was failing rapidly. His condition was so precarious that Blake deemed it advisable to notify his wife. This responsibility he assumed without consulting Folsom, for he knew that his friend would object, probably in no measured terms. But Blake did not risk putting off a matter as urgent as this. He began writing the message, intending to send it to Marcia, hoping to reach Mrs. Folsom in that way; but when he had written the date and her name, he was shocked to realize that he did not know where she was, had not known for more than a week. He consulted the calendar and counted ten days since he had heard from her. He was horrified at the realization. The fact that he had not received any letters had worried him before, but he had dismissed the matter as lightly as possible, convincing himself that there was nothing seriously wrong. Doubtless she was traveling and found it difficult to write. But day by day he had found it harder to content himself with the assumption he would hear from her tomorrow. Still, this state of affairs might have continued indefinitely had Folsom's health not made it imperative to locate her.

For two days he sent telegrams to possible addresses, all of which were returned. He spent most of his time in a state of nervous restlessness, tramping to and fro between his office and Folsom's room. Then his uneasiness turned to frenzied delirium.

"My God!" he groaned. "Has the earth opened and swallowed them?"

Folsom continued to make feeble attempts to put him at ease, even after he had entered the throe of death.

"The women are all right," he assured him. "They don't think like we do."

Then, on the night when Folsom's life was at ebb tide, remaining so for many weary hours, to finally end in death near the break of day, the world seemed to come to an end for Blake. The loss of his friend and business partner alone caused him enough grief to make him cry for solace, but this was only a trifle compared with the stress and anxiety he had endured for days. He felt keenly that he must get away for a while. As if trying to run away from his sorrows he climbed into the now old and worn sedan he had purchased several years ago for his first trip to Lashaway with Marcia, and unconsciously chose the street that eventually became the road past Phyllis' house.

As he approached her place he saw an unusually bright light in one of the two windows on that side of the house. He drove slowly, wondering what the light signified. As he came nearer, he saw the dim outline of someone seated beside a table, face buried in hands. He knew it must be one of the two women, though he could think of no reason why either of them should be up at this time, unless the baby was sick, and if he was, why had they neglected calling him? He brought his automobile to a stop and walked hurriedly toward the house. When he got near enough to see the light shine golden through the hair of the one so sadly motionless, he knew it was Phyllis. Her airedale dog set up a furious barking. After a little coaxing the dog took to romping about him, pushing Blake rudely against the door as he rapped.

"I had to stop," he explained, when Phyllis opened the

door reluctantly. "I didn't know what to make of the light—you up this late in the night."

"I'm all right," she assured him. "But something made me restless. So I'm up early."

"This is not early. It's very late."

"It seemed the night would never pass."

"And you couldn't sleep?"

"No," she whispered. "I think I was afraid."

"Then I'm glad I stopped. You don't mind?"

"I was so lonely."

"Lonely?"

"Yes," she whispered again. "And I knew you must be lonely, too."

"How did you know?"

"I knew Mr. Folsom was very ill and that would—"

"He died," broke in Blake, as if trying to lighten his load of sadness by telling her. "Poor fellow. How he struggled to the last against death. And his going is just the thing to break me up completely. Perhaps he knew it and that is why he fought so hard. I wonder if it was that? I have to get away from it for a while, so I'm on my way to the country. I feel that I never want to come back."

As he stood in the dim moonlight, Phyllis thought she could see his eyes welling with tears. It seemed incredible in a man of his sort, who had seen death numberless times. Then, as he stepped into the room, where the light gave her a better view of his face, she saw that his cheeks were wet.

"I am sorry, so sorry that you've lost your friend," she said tenderly. "I wish I could take his place." She paused a little uneasily. "Or that I could replace what you have lost," she amended.

He took her hands in his. "I wish you could," he said. "More than that, I wish you—" He broke off, a clear meaning in his eyes. "I love you, Phyllis," he said brokenly, "forgive me for saying it, but, so help me God, I love you."

What he had said did not surprise her much, for such affection as she had for him could not go on indefinitely without response. Still she was unnerved, and pretend-

ing that she heard her boy calling for her, she freed her hands and hurried into an adjoining room. She found the child sleeping soundly, giving her the opportunity she wanted—to think. Blake had previously told her that he liked her; that was quite natural and common among people, and it was possible that a man with his wide acquaintance liked a great many women, probably disliked as many more. She had been aware that he had had more than a passing interest in her since the day he had removed her from the dingy lodging house to the hospital; this he showed conclusively when he installed her in his cottage and secured Gracie as her companion. But to believe that he loved her—that was an entirely different thing. To think that he knew what he did about her and yet have him say he loved her seemed preposterous. A wonderful man like him in love with an ordinary girl like her! Impossible.

Another way of looking at the matter suggested itself to her. How could a man with a wife as talented and extraordinary as Marcia be in love with her? It could not be! Then, too, a married man declaring his love for her was a flagrant infraction on the laws of society as she understood them. It was a horrible thing to think of, and it sent the blood pounding to her temples. Infatuation, she thought, that was it! But she could not even believe that infatuation had prompted him to say what he had. She interpreted his declaration of love as leading up to a demand for sensual gratification. She tried to hold this before her mind as a burning insult, hoping thereby to create a hatred for him and make it easier for her to put him out of her mind, for she knew she must fight hard to control an inclination to surrender herself to this man.

All through her mental battle against him her subconscious mind was persistently coming to his defense. She hoped her prolonged absence would discourage him and cause him to leave; she felt more secure when not in his presence. Once she did hear a noise, and thought he was going, but when she drew back the window shade and peered out she saw only the airedale prowling around protectingly. So she fell back on the bed for further

silent meditation. Her thoughts began to clarify and blend with the chirp of the crickets and the raucous croak of the frogs in the creek back of the house. These sounds had always made agreeable music to her ears, but suddenly they became a harmony of almost unbearable loneliness and anguish.

She had never before experienced anything like this. Though she had had a love affair that teemed with sweet and bitter sorrow, when even her most rational moments were devoid of clear thinking, eventually to find herself confronted by the greatest problem of her life, her girlish innocence had helped then to lighten her burden. With maturity there came more and more the realization that indiscreet love exacts a severe penalty, and in admitting her love for Blake she was willing to forego her resolution to forever exclude men from her affections and gladly suffer the same punishment or worse than she had endured—if she could have him.

Thoughts continued to crowd through her brain. Her first impression of the situation, disconcerting as it was, had passed. She had attempted to regard the whole thing with contempt, only to find that she was meeting with no success whatever. She weighed the issues carefully, not only giving her own feelings consideration, but his also; she found it alarmingly easy to excuse him for any mistakes he had made. At one time in her mental battle she had been able to persuade herself that Blake had been inspired in his advances by a purely beastly motive, but now things came to her mind that made her see why he might be sentimental even if he did not love her, for she still maintained the belief that such a thing as him loving her was impossible.

"He is lonely," she murmured to herself. "That in itself explains everything." Then she paused to reflect. She could not recall that Lyman Curtis had ever declared his love for her, though she had loved him with all the devotion of her heart. Her only regret—and even now she doubted that she had anything real to regret—was that it had blinded her to right and wrong. She did not believe that she had cause to be remorseful over an act that had been inspired by a love as uncontrollable

as the winds. "But why do such terrible things fall on me?" she pondered, half aloud, her thoughts turning back to Blake. "Of all the thousands and thousands, why me?" If he was lonely, that could not be held against him. Nor was it wrong of him to want companionship. In this she felt herself relenting to appeal, but still maintaining that *she* should be left to her freedom. The more she struggled with the mooted question the more conscious she became of how easily she could respond to his love—if she was certain he loved her. She considered with scorn the barrier his marriage to Marcia formed between them, vaguely recounting to herself the various ways a separation from her might be effected. Then once more the injustice of the situation smote her. "Why, oh, why does he tell me that he loves me?"

It was nearly an hour since she had left Blake; having heard none of the usual confusion attendant upon the rousing of a child from its sleep when she indicated the baby needed her attention, he grew restless at her prolonged absence. Listening intently, he could hear only the deep, gentle breathing of the child. All else in deathly quietness! He hastened to look for Phyllis. He found her lying on the bed beside her slumbering boy, sobbing bitterly. Picking her up in his arms, he tried to look into her eyes, but she strained her face away from him.

"Have I hurt you?" he demanded tenderly. "Tell me, have I?"

For some time she remained inflexible against his attempts to draw her to him; then, gradually, her instinctive resistance relaxed and she slowly turned her head toward him. Uncertain of what she would say or do, he partially relaxed his passionate embrace, for the moment had passed when he thought she had no right to struggle against his caress regardless of her feeling.

"I can hardly think that you spoke only after you had considered what you were saying!"

"Of my love for you?"

"Yes."

"Nobody has ever spoken to you with greater sincerity than I did, though the impulse was surprising to myself,"

he declared. "For a long time I've been very lonely; that drove me to seek companionship—instinctively. When I found that companionship in you I couldn't stop there, for it was more than companionship that I wanted. There is a vacancy somewhere, and when I saw you yesterday I began to understand how completely your presence filled that want. Something covetous seemed to break loose within me. I not only want you, but I love you."

"You're doing me a great injustice," she protested seriously.

"I don't understand."

"To talk to me about love," she explained. "You know the vast, insurmountable barrier that lies between us."

He nodded his head. "You're right," he admitted.

She regarded him doubtfully, wondering if he might be taunting her, knowing her as well as he did.

"The lessons I've learned through my mistakes are all very vividly impressed on my mind," she said gloomily.

"Let's not talk about that," he cut her short.

She stirred with a reminiscent shudder, got up and left the room. He followed her. With an impulsive twist she turned to him, her face pallid, her eyes bright with bitterness. She was trying to conceal the tenderness her entire being held for him.

"This is impossible!" she protested, the pain in her heart causing the vivid whiteness of her face to pale deeper. "You must not talk of love to me again. Please go."

He went to the door, and as he paused an instant before opening it, she went instinctively to his side.

"I love you," he said, taking her in his arms, bending down and kissing her. "I will always love you." Then, kissing her again, he hastened away.

"And I love you, too," she called softly after him. But he did not hear her. "And I will always love you," she called again, more softly than before.

She remained motionless as she watched him hurry toward his automobile; and when his outlines were lost in the gray dawn, she listened for the hum of the motor.

Chapter X

There was much whispered disapproval expressed by those who professed to be Folsom's friends, some of it of an extremely indignant nature, when his body was held at the morgue for more than a week pending the locating and return of his wife. Some people expressed themselves as feeling that the outcome was only what they had all along predicted. The situation also gave Folsom's political and business enemies cause for silent but genuine triumph, even if it had required the hand of destiny to bring about a result of which they were incapable. At last their opponent was vanquished, and they need no longer fear that the cunning politician and financier would ever again make a last-minute stand and turn defeat into victory.

When Folsom's death became known, an uncle, Cloque by name, hurried on to Waverly. He made the long journey for no other purpose than to obtain an estimate of the size of the slice he was to receive from the estate, although he ostensibly came to carry out his nephew's last request, and take his body to a St. Louis mortuary for cremation. It was reasonable to assume that he had received some assurance of remuneration for this service.

Cloque, from whom Folsom had inherited many of his peculiar characteristics, also made good use in another way of Mrs. Folsom's absence during her husband's illness and following his death, over which he pretended to be deeply perturbed. As a matter of fact, he was nursing a grudge against her because she had frustrated his attempt to obtain a substantial loan from her husband. It was only after diligent inquiry that the uncle found out what day Mrs. Folsom would return to Waverly, whereupon he proceeded to arrange to have Folsom's body on a railway express truck at the depot when she stepped from the train.

"I'll teach her a lesson!" he declared vehemently. "The

only way she can be made to feel ashamed is to shock her into it. Probably then she'll show the respect she should for her husband."

The thing worked out beyond Cloque's fondest intent, in all but one respect—Mrs. Folsom was not shocked, though she had sent a touching reply to the telegram that had informed her of her husband's death while she was en route home.

The undertaker, knowing that his reimbursement would be substantial, and subconsciously trained in giving the utmost of consideration and sympathy to the bereaved, preceded ahead several stations by automobile to prepare Mrs. Folsom for the diabolical situation the uncle had planned, and he assisted her from the Pullman with sober tenderness. A curious crowd had gathered and was breathlessly watching them through the window as they moved along the aisle, the undertaker's grasp firm on her arm. When she finally stood on the platform, the assembly permitted itself a sigh of relief—she was controlling her emotions beautifully. She had alighted from the train, despite the undertaker's endeavor to make the occasion a sad one, with the nonchalance of a debutante returning from a week-end spent with an aunt.

"Is that Tom in there?" she asked plaintively, as if her husband had deliberately chosen to die while she was away. "In that wooden thing?"

The undertaker nodded soberly.

"Poor boy!"

There was not a sign of tears in her eyes, though the faintest gleam of a supercilious smile lit her face. For a moment her gaze remained unflinchingly directed at the glaringly new box lying on a hand-truck not far away. On the side was painted the name "Thomas Folsom" in black letters. To the right of this, at an angle of forty-five degrees, was, "Express."

"Who ever thought poor Tom would some day become mere express," she sighed.

Then she placed her arm around Marcia's waist and walked toward an automobile a friend had provided for her. Far back in the crowd she observed Cloque.

* * * * *

But Mrs. Folsom was not as indifferent to the death of her husband as she had pretended to be. She had a part to play and she had played it well, but in her home, alone with Marcia, she gave vent to her pent-up grief. The home was no longer home; it was like a thing that is in competition with itself. No one could have suffered a more intolerable sorrow than she; yet it was rumored that if Folsom had not died when he did a divorce would have been inevitable. Since Folsom's death had definitely put an end to such a possibility, and Marcia had been Mrs. Folsom's companion during her recent sojourn, the scandalmongers automatically chose her for disparagement even before she returned home.

Although the married life of the Folsoms had never been marked by tender affection, the fact that they had lived together for twenty years was sufficient assurance that Mrs. Folsom's behavior at the depot was merely an effort to throw her disparagers into confusion. When all conditions are favorable and the mind imaginative, it is possible to fancy that oil poured on troubled waters has a calming effect; but more often fire is fought with fire, and one must conclude that such was the course Mrs. Folsom had determined to pursue when the undertaker had so kindly become her informant. Marcia rebelled stubbornly against her attitude.

"You're making it difficult for me," she complained. "You're foot-loose—can do as you please. I have to maintain the dignity of my home. The remarks you made at the depot are open to censure, and anything you say reacts more against me than yourself. There is no telling what effect all this will have on Don. Our affairs are linked in such a way that I'm bound to suffer when your behavior is not—"

"Oh, now, my dear," broke in Mrs. Folsom, "I hope you haven't forgotten how delightful and perfectly discreet you thought my actions were when I helped you the time Mr. Willets was a guest in your home."

"I'll never forget it. I've often told you how grateful I feel."

Even as Marcia spoke she resolved never again to make even one of her closest friends her confidante, or allow

them to do something for her that she must eventually repay, probably with interest so compounded that it would bankrupt her.

"Then think of that now—hard," Mrs. Folsom advised her. "Stick—to—me—now—if—you—ever—did. I need you."

Marcia saw that in her grief her friend was thinking only of herself.

"All right," she assented. "What do you want me to do?"

"I don't know yet," returned the other hysterically. "But there'll be enough when I can think."

Marcia felt it best that she should be wary of making promises, but her generous heart did not hesitate long over a decision, even though she was perturbed. "Very well," she assented, "you can depend on me."

"Oh, thank you so much. You *are* a darling!"

Yet Marcia could not bring herself to believe that she was really indebted to the extent her friend claimed, for Mrs. Folsom had assumed the rôle of hostess to Willets on her own initiative; this, however, was no time for contention. She remembered very vividly how much she had welcomed Mrs. Folsom's attention to Willets after Mrs. Strachan had spoken insinuatingly about his convalescence at her home. Even though an altogether selfish motive had inspired Mrs. Folsom in this, Marcia considered it was one of the most unselfish things she had ever done for her.

After weighing her thoughts, Marcia announced, "I'm doing it to help combat a lot of catty gossips!"

The ring of bitterness in her voice roused Mrs. Folsom's apprehension. She moved over to where Marcia was ensconced in a pile of pillows on the divan.

"I always thought you were my friend," she said, muffled sobbing choking her words. "Are you?"

"Why, of course, I am," Marcia assured her. "You know that."

"Then don't hurt me more than I have already been hurt. You're so vindictive when you speak to me. . . . Please don't be!"

Marcia frowned. "You have suddenly changed. Less than an hour ago you seemed very indifferent."

"That was forced," the other broke in. "You know as well as I do that that was only pretended indifference." She looked up suddenly. "Do you think I could really be as void of all feeling as that?"

"I'm undecided," Marcia admitted.

Mrs. Folsom grew defiant. "You're *not* undecided," she declared hotly. "Your opinion of me parallels that of Cloque and others, but I don't care any more *who* I offend with my actions." She sank limply into a chair, sobbing, her head falling into the curve of her plump arm. After a while she sat up and dried her eyes, looking at Marcia with a sidewise glance. "I see grief has no friends," she said, with an air of beautiful resignation.

"You're magnifying your troubles," accused Marcia curtly. "Sometime ago I did that and I know what it is."

Marcia wanted to be sorry for Mrs. Folsom, though she knew that her outbursts must be regarded rather lightly, for neither Cloque nor any other living mortal had the power to inflict a hurt on her conscience.

"You speak to me with the rancor of my worst enemy. I had hoped you were one who would never hate me."

Marcia's irritability increased. "I'll never hate you," she protested, "but if you continue to talk the way you have you'll make me angry!"

Mrs. Folsom stirred uneasily. "I am sick."

"So am I."

"I wish I'd stayed at home."

"So do I; yet I cannot say I'm sorry I attended the convention. It's a pity, however, that people are unable to control their tongues. It hardly seems possible that a mistake was made at the time of creation, but it does appear that there was a slip somewhere when everybody was given a full quota of tongue and vocal chords, regardless of their ability to control them. Some people should be without these organs, just as some birds are without sufficient wings for flight."

"There are those who are short more than that," suggested Mrs. Folsom, apparently finding relief in the accusation. "People don't know themselves. They grow old

before they find the place where they belong. The world could get along with less variety."

"Yes, I believe it could," Marcia assented absently. "In fact, there's no question in my mind about you being right."

Then they remained silent, both deep in meditation, as if trying to find their particular niches.

* * * * *

Because Blake was not at the depot to meet Marcia when she arrived, she worried over it all the way home, and this uneasiness was in a great measure responsible for her testy replies and irritability toward Mrs. Folsom. Her mood was one of suspended emotion as the taxi bumped over the worn, rough brick pavement, until she saw her little gray-and-brown home in the distance, when she became conscious of strange and disquieting fears.

After alighting and paying the driver, she hesitated an instant, watching the taxi as it whirled away. Then, with sudden determination, she hurried up the inclined walk toward the house. Once inside, a feeling of security and reassurance came over her, and she breathed a sigh of relief. In the house she found only the self-effacing Pansy to greet her. The fact that Blake had so far evaded her entirely, whether intentionally or not, caused her some anxiety. She thought the thing over. She grew angry for no definite cause, and her anger was followed by various nervous reactions, a condition for the most part peculiar to the feminine sex. She paced about the house to relieve her twitching muscles. At short intervals she stopped at one of the windows facing the street, looking out expectantly, and when Blake did not appear her gaze strayed far out into space. A train of depressing thoughts surged through her brain. She wished she had not told Mrs. Folsom she did not regret attending the convention.

Suddenly, automatically, she resumed her old habit of looking for her husband in the private consultation room he maintained in the house. As she opened the door of this room a musty smell filtered through her nostrils. She rolled up the half-drawn shades, raised the windows. Evidently the room had not been occupied for several days—probably weeks. On the desk was a writing pad

with a long list of names. The writing was Pansy's peculiarly microscopic script. On a shelf beside the desk were a dozen or more empty prescription bottles, each placed on a small piece of paper with a memorandum on it; these notations were also written in Pansy's handwriting. There was a stack of unopened mail and a telegram tucked away in a drawer. The message she tried to avoid seeing a second time, for she had always had a horror of the sealed yellow envelopes of telegrams; they had been a source of terror to her since the day one had brought her the sad news of her mother's death. But try as she would, she could not avoid seeing and speculating about this telegram. For some time she continued to worry over it. Then she realized that it was not altogether her innate aversion for the telegram that was troubling her; it was the evil atmosphere created by the musty smell in the room, the accumulation of dust on the furniture, the week-old unopened mail, the inexplicable absence of Blake, that was causing her perturbation.

She was hurrying from the room when a suffocating lump rose in her throat, her knees trembled, her hands became numb, and her vision blurred. She steadied herself against the door. When she had regained her composure sufficiently to trust her legs to bear her weight, she went back and with nervous hands ripped open the yellow envelope. It was as she had expected—her own message, which she had sent three days ago. Then, in a wild frenzy, she hurried to Pansy.

"When did this telegram arrive?" she demanded.

"I don't know," said Pansy, meekly.

"You don't know?"

"I mean, I don't remember."

"Who signed for it?"

"I did."

"And you don't remember when you did it?"

"Well, no."

Pansy was talking with an evasiveness unnatural to her. Marcia suspected she had been prompted. She would try to throw her off her guard.

"It wasn't a long time ago that it came?"

"Today? You mean it was not long today since it came?"

This reply, Marcia thought, was more in conformity with the maid's mentality. There was in this at least some comparison with her usual vernacular. Marcia assumed from this that she had diverted the maid's attention from her carefully prepared way of answering the questions that were put to her.

"Where is Doctor Blake?" Marcia asked quickly. "You know!"

"Well, let me see," said the maid helplessly.

Evidently Pansy was in a quandary. Her unusual behavior put Marcia on the alert for a hint that might betray Blake. Although she avoided this successfully, it was evident that the girl was doing her best to shield him.

"Where is he?" Marcia reiterated her demand. "Do you know?"

"Don't you think, ma'am," asked Pansy slyly, "that it would be more good for you to keep your eye on your husband than to 'low I should do it?"

Marcia was dumbfounded. All she could do was glare at the girl. Several times, while listening to her friends lamenting over the servant situation, Marcia had expounded her positive methods of dealing with unruly servants. Now the opportunity to prove her theories was at hand, and she was helpless. She thought of dismissing Pansy, but the maid had indicated that she would willingly accept just such a punishment, and probably would be glad to make a change. Such a course would not remedy the situation; and, after all, whose fault was it that Pansy had spoken so disrespectfully? But Pansy's defiant attitude compelled her to resort to coaxing as she questioned further. "Then you don't know where Doctor Blake is?"

"No, ma'am."

"When was he home the last time?"

"I don't know, ma'am. His comings and goings ain't never the same for some time now."

"Very well. . . . Go about your work."

* * * * *

It was long after Blake's usual time to come home for

the evening before Marcia telephoned to his office to ascertain what was keeping him. She had been waiting all of a minute before she heard the receiver at the other end of the line lifted, and then there was no other sound. The silence at the other end of the line made her furious.

"Is that you, Don?" she inquired.

"Ye-yes. . . . Well, you in town?"

His voice sounded thick, as if it might be that of a drunken man. It was with a terrible effort that she assured him that she was in town, . . . at home, . . . had been for a long time.

"Uh-huh," he grunted. "Someone just told me you got home. I didn't believe it. . . . Was just going to telephone to find out if it was so when I found you on the line."

She was horrified. It was really the first time Blake had ever been so high-handed when speaking to her.

"When are you coming home?" she asked, more as a matter of custom than because she had any desire to see him. "You know, I'm anxious to see you."

"You are, eh?"

"Why . . . of course . . . I am."

"I'll be there as soon as I finish here."

"Finish what?" she demanded sharply.

"Well, my professional duties haven't become entirely public while you were away!" he reminded her. "I'm busy right now."

With that the receiver clicked on the hook. His curt, ambiguous reply was maddening to Marcia. She could not understand it! Donald Blake acting like that! She was afraid to see him while he was in this mood. She wanted to go for a drive and be away when he came home, but that would only complicate the situation further. There was no other way but to remain and face what was confronting her.

Pansy was requested to give her best efforts to the evening meal, to hurry into preparation a certain few delicacies that had hitherto pleased Blake. But the haste was unnecessary, for it was two hours before he brought his automobile to an abrupt stop on the concrete drive, midway between the street and garage.

Marcia had hastened out when she saw him coming and was standing in the door, nervously pressing her nails into her lips as Blake climbed out of the machine. He failed to notice her, did not appear to look for her. When he began romping playfully with a Boston bull pup, an addition to the household during her absence, she felt strongly inclined to flight. But immediately she excused his actions. The dog was entitled to first consideration, having shown enough interest in his master to rush out to him. She should be no less demonstrative than the dog, and, running down the steps, she hurried toward him. He looked up from his sitting posture as he held the dog captive with his back to the ground.

"Let go a minute, Bo," he commanded the pup, trying to free himself from the tenaciously gripping jaws fastened on the sleeve of his coat. "Bo, let go, I tell you!" He cuffed the dog vigorously. "So you are home," he said, rising. Then, putting his arm carelessly about her, added, "You look as if you'd had a fine trip. I'm glad of it. I made enough money today to pay for the whole business."

He flourished a handful of currency and then shoved the money into Marcia's apron pocket. **This was an unusual greeting.**

"How nice!" she said with a smile. "But it's time I came home or you'd have grown too rich for me."

"Well, did you enjoy yourself?"

"Yes. Very much."

He bent down and kissed her on the cheek with about the same ardor shown by a boy who is compelled to kiss an aunt he does not like.

"Well, you could have stayed longer. We were getting along fine," he offered generously.

"I think I've been away too long now," she replied sadly. "I'm never going away again . . . without you."

He seemed not to hear her. Apparently he was more coldly indifferent than when she left. Was it possible that this state was becoming habitual with him? Was it her fault?

She had expected to find him changed, either com-

plaining or exultant. Some change had been anticipated, either because of his inability to locate her before Folsom's death, or because of her prolonged absence. Instead, she found him manifestly inured to her absence, of which he had complained so violently during her first venture into politics. Marcia had prepared herself for a condition that failed to exist. Had Blake been abusive, she would not have resented it; had he been exuberant in his affection and joy at her return, she would have reciprocated; had he been suspicious and jealous, she would not have blamed him. But to find him apathetic was distracting. It was neither anger nor happiness that she perceived in his face, nor sign of hurt. It was, instead, a mingling of mental stress and a wearisome vacuity. He seemed to have experienced a return of that feminine disinterest that had marked his boyhood and early manhood, and which was still in evidence when she became acquainted with him.

Marcia sat down on the running-board of the car. Like the woman she was, she wanted to laugh, to cry, to give vent to the myriad emotions that were surging for expression. Such was the shock of the realization that came to her. Then he increased her perplexity with the strangest conduct she had ever seen him display.

"Heavens! I never knew I could miss you the way I did," he said, reaching down and putting his powerful arm around her waist and lifting her with strangely caressing roughness. This was indeed an unprecedented thing for him to do. His actions were unnatural and mechanical. They were as mysterious to her as the machinations of a conjurer. His heavy eyes were congested as he held her close. On his breath was the smell of liquor, but she could have forgiven this and everything else if he would only love her with his former tenderness. "God, how I've missed you," he repeated, with a brutality of inflection that made his words repulsive.

"How strong you are!" she sighed, evading him as he again closed his arm savagely about her. "And you really missed me?"

"You little devil, don't think for a minute that I didn't!"

"I don't," she said lightly, trying hard to overlook his behavior. "Of course, I don't."

This thought came to her: could he ever again be the man of old? But she was also certain of this: whatever shortcomings he had recently developed she would gladly ignore, even if she could not easily tolerate them.

As they walked to the house, she observed positive signs of intoxication, and she took affectionate hold of his arm. When they mounted the steps he swayed and staggered, his bulk pulling her with him. He made a splendid attempt to conceal his unsteadiness. As his real condition became more and more apparent, his conduct was more understandable. Although Marcia was too inexperienced to know, she presumed he had been extremely drunk for a prolonged period, though he was eminently able to take care of himself at the present time. The dog, his name, suddenly had a very deep significance for her. It was one that might be the choice of the ribald and low-bred. Had he been associating with such while she was away?

"'Bo!'" she murmured under her breath. "Such a name! It doesn't sound like him. Not like Donald Blake. I could easily enough imagine him calling a dog Prince. . . . But Bo. . . . No! Positively not that!"

"Look out there, Bo," Blake attempted to check the dog in his gambolings. "Take it easy, now."

"Where did you get that dog?" she asked. "And that name?"

Blake took time to answer. "He was given to me by a friend," he said at length. "He had that name when I got him."

"He is such a funny thing!"

"Don't you like him?"

"Oh, yes." But she did not.

"Here, Bo, old boy," coaxed Blake when they were in the house, "get up there and show Mamma what you can do. Come on, now. Get up there in that chair. Go on. . . . Mind. . . . Go on, now. Get up there."

The dog clambered with puppy-like laboriousness into a large tapestry chair.

"Watch him, Marcia," Blake urged. "He's going to do a trick."

Further verbal instructions to coax the dog through a series of singularly awkward contortions were not required.

"Who taught him those tricks?" Marcia inquired with curious interest.

Blake looked boyish. "I did."

"He must be an apt dog to learn so quickly."

"A lot can happen in six weeks," he reminded her.

Marcia was ashamed to think she had been away that long and did not care to speak about it.

"He's wonderfully well trained for a pup."

"Wouldn't I be an excellent father if we had children?" he suggested with mild sarcasm. "Think of the good qualities in me that have never been given a chance."

Marcia ignored his reference to their childless marriage and continued to center her interest in the dog.

"He will ruin the chair with antics like that," she suggested. Then, pointing at a smudge the dog had made on the upholstery, she added, "Look at what he did just now."

"Uh-huh. Performances of this kind will have to be limited to one or possibly two weekly."

"Dogs really shouldn't be allowed in the house at all."

"I agree with you!"

"Then why are you training him to be a house-dog?"

"For companionship."

Pansy came to the door and announced that dinner was served. They left the room together, the dog at Blake's heels. At the table, when Marcia was seated, Blake grasped her by the arm, bringing brutal pressure to bear on it. Although intended as a display of affection, he seemed also to be trying to show her how utterly he could dominate her with his extraordinary strength, and how useless it would be for her to fight against him if she ever found it necessary to do so.

* * * * *

For several days Marcia had difficulty adjusting herself to conditions. The very furnishings in her house did not look the same, and she wondered at her taste when

she had selected them. The streets in Waverly were desolate; she missed the taxi-cabs and trolley cars; the buildings along the business thoroughfares were such unpretentious affairs that she smiled pityingly every time she looked at them.

But by the end of a week she had again fallen into a groove of monotonous tolerance, content to live in an isolated little world that consisted of Waverly and its trade territory, where her wildest activity was extensive and undisturbed reading, attendance on social functions and club gatherings, going to the movies, and helping Pansy with the cooking and cleaning. Blake had again expressed a desire that she should accompany him on long drives in the country; and as time passed and she accustomed herself to his changed ways, nothing worried her, except that her ambition periodically flared up like a dormant volcano, and she had difficulty in controlling a yearning to get away.

With attacks of restlessness recurring more regularly, Marcia's idea to make Waverly a port-of-entrance for politicians was revived. She decided that the town could be rejuvenated and transformed into a budding metropolis. Enough of those with social aspirations, financial requisites, business ability, set off with a sufficient sprinkling of the artistically adept, resided there to make such a thing a possibility. All that was lacking was the initial incentive. But Marcia could not provide this—that is, go further than suggesting it to some ambitious person who could devote time to it. At present her work was in relation with other phases of politics—she was already contemplating a speaking tour for the successful convention candidate, if she found Willets persistently urgent enough.

Folsom, who had succumbed prematurely to the beckoning of death, could have undertaken both of these ventures at one time and have succeeded with ease. She criticized him even now because he had never attempted it. But Folsom was the type who was content to see others held in subjection through his own aggression. As long as his competitors were not allowed to advance beyond a certain point they were not likely to pass him. Even successful men have their faults, and he had his, the chief

of which was his refusal to divulge the press-button that had made his life a success. He believed in making everybody work out their own destiny.

For some unknown reason the thought of Folsom was persistently returning to Marcia's mind that day. There also came the realization of how invaluable he had been to her as a political colleague. He had told her he did not believe in wheedling the comatose worm from his cocoon and instilling him with the ambition that would ultimately convert him into a formidable competitor; he believed that the survival of the fittest was the world's natural defense against deterioration and retrogression. To advise a man how to make a better livelihood without increasing his energy was nothing other than teaching him to gamble well. "The farmer does not feed acorns to his hogs because he loves them," he had told her.

One day, while on a drive in the country with Blake, Marcia had an unusually severe seizure of one of these fits of retrospective despondency. But when she came home and found a letter in the mail from Willets, her outlook on the world grew brighter. In his letter Willets asked her to help him elect the man the convention had brought forward as the standard bearer of his party. Because he was laboring against tremendous odds, it was obvious why he was calling on every resource at his command to stem the menacing tide. It filled her with an unwarranted pride when he went on to explain that he could think of no one who understood the intricacies of the political situation in her community as she did; therefore it was of paramount importance that he avail himself of her support. The time had come when he must demonstrate that his party was justified in the confidence it had in him. He was asking her to help him avert defeat at the hands of his enemies, in and outside of the party, and save him from the ignominy that accompanies failure.

It was, indeed, an unusual sort of letter to receive from one who had reigned so supremely at the convention only a few weeks before; still it contained much sound reasoning; and part of it revealed the writer's rather selfish nature. Marcia's first impulse was to refuse Willet's request. But when a telegram followed the letter while she

was still pondering over it, she concluded that he must be urgently in need of her support. She wanted him to succeed, and without her aid he might fail. He was admitting that much himself! She was holding his destiny in her hands. Suddenly, in her impulsive way, and without consulting Blake, she resolved to stand by him before it was too late. A reply in the form of a night-letter telegram was sent to Willets that night.

When she told Blake about what she had done he objected strenuously. Whims of one kind or another were seizing her more and more frequently, and his opposition to her plans arose spontaneously within him. Then he thought that possibly he might be unreasonable. But after discussing the matter at great length with Marcia, devoting rational consideration to it to make certain that his opposition was not merely a flare-up of the impulses, he found his determination to keep her out of the campaign unaltered. He employed every persuasive means he could think of to induce her to withdraw her acceptance. But Marcia, despite his demands and pleadings, remained obdurate, continuing to make preparations to begin work as soon as an itinerary could be assigned to her.

It was now that Blake realized, for the first time since he had known Marcia, what kind of will power he was dealing with. So far in his professional career he had been successful beyond his fondest dream, but it took something like this—Marcia's inflexible will—to prove to him that he was only a smoothly working machine, one that performed beautifully as long as it was not thrown out of order by some unexpected twist. In Marcia he perceived another kind of machine, a delicate but forceful one, that managed the most intricate affairs with such tact that the force she employed was perceptible only as a convincing persuasion. But she could be so redoubtable, tenaciously resolute, when other means failed, that he could see himself brushed aside by her firmness, while he blundered in to fill the gap left in her wake.

"Politicians are parasites," he declared at last, "who don't hesitate to suck the last drop of blood out of people

who trust them. If you are going through with this thing I'll think the same of you!"

"I'm not that kind of a politician," she objected mildly. "If I couldn't be something different it would be useless for me to take up the cudgel."

"Then what are you?"

"A speaker, a messenger heralding the coming of a new era," she replied fantastically. "An enlightenment for those who—"

"Oh, bunk!" he broke in. "I hate to hear you babble like a fool!"

"You don't understand. I'm serious."

"Then let us talk seriously."

"All right," she assented. "Go ahead. I'll listen."

"You are nothing but a cog in a wheel of a damnable political machine!" he declared impetuously. "I know."

"Do you really think I am precisely that?"

"You are, figuratively speaking."

Marcia's face twisted into an expression of pain, her eyes cloudy.

"This speaking tour of four weeks will be the last of my campaigning. But I must do it. . . . Don't think that I want to be antagonistic, Don. I've promised. . . . Won't you be a good boy and let me fulfill my promise without making me feel that I'm stealing something from you? Allow me to do this and it will positively be the end of my campaigning."

He felt easier, glad that she was willing to make even this concession.

"If it is your last," he said, "I'll consent."

"It will be my last," she promised.

* * * * *

The same mail that had brought the letter from Willets also contained a letter from Mrs. Folsom. She was spending a fortnight with relatives in St. Louis before proceeding East to make arrangements to place her children in a boarding school for the winter. Marcia was glad she had no children to place in a boarding school or to leave at home with the nurse-maid. At least people could not accuse her of neglecting them.

The letter practically commanded Marcia to go to

the Folsom mansion—the Folsoms had purchased the great graystone house from the Dumont estate—to see that Coats, the caretaker, was precisely carrying out her orders about protecting the furniture and hangings and silver and paintings and what not against dust and other injury. Her postscript read, “And then you know how Coats behaves when I’m away. I can’t trust him. He might make my house a rendezvous for card playing and drinking. Please remind him that I’ll not tolerate anything like that.”

Marcia hurried over to the Folsom house early the following morning. It was one of those splendid late summer days that makes one wish the whole year could be crammed into this particular season. The sun was warm, but the stifling humidity of summer had vanished from the air. Coats was in an open space on the lawn talking authoritatively to a man Marcia recognized as Garrish, the city engineer. A third person, a woman, wearing a large, drooping velour hat and standing with her back toward Marcia, was jotting notes on a writing-pad which Garrish dictated to her with predicated gestures when Coats was not monopolizing the conversation.

“Good morning, Mrs. Blake,” said Coats, bowing elaborately when he observed her. “Whom do you wish to see?”

As Coats spoke to Marcia the woman swung around abruptly. She was young, fair, of marked features, her brown eyes half veiled by their tawny lashes. Something instantly stirred Marcia’s recollective faculties into activity. Groping far back in the remotest recesses of her brain, the image of this woman was uncovered, but her identity still escaped her. The thing puzzled her uncomfortably—the vague recollection she had of this woman.

“Yes, Coats,” she said abstractedly, “I wish to speak to you.”

“In just a moment, ma’am,” he replied, with a sort of veiled insolence. “If you aren’t in too big a hurry.”

Marcia bit her lips impatiently over his impertinence. Coats was one of those fatuous persons whose mind ceases to develop at an early age, although the body

continues to grow to the proportions of an ordinary man. That was why he became inflated with importance when Marcia informed him she had a business matter to transact directly with him. He could have instantly concluded his business with Garrish, for he had called the engineer to consult over a trivial transaction to which his mistress had objected in the usual manner when he had tried to induce her to agree to it. He had selected a time when Mrs. Folsom was absent to obtain estimates on the cost of a grade line for the grounds. "That will facilitate a better drainage for the turf and check the rank growth of water-grass that yearly becomes more of a nuisance." He said more as he paid Garrish with his own money. Then he excused himself and moved toward Marcia.

"What is it, ma'am?" he asked. "Sorry I had to keep you waiting."

"I have a letter here from Mrs. Folsom."

"Yes, ma'am."

Marcia thought it was best to produce the letter as a credential to permit her to go through the house. Knowing him as she did, she thought he might become objectionable if he felt she was acting without authority. He eagerly reached for the letter while she was unfolding it to find the part she wanted him to read. She drew away sharply.

"This is a personal letter," she objected. She knew she must be severe with him if she was to deal with him at all. Then, indicating with her finger, she added, "This is the only paragraph in which you are interested."

Coats read long enough to go over the entire seven pages, which he would undoubtedly have done if he had been left in possession of the letter, for he was slowly unfolding and turning it when Marcia requested him to return it to her.

"That is just like the woman," he said deprecatingly. "She's always worrying. Her grief is so intense and yet she finds time to—"

"Come," she interrupted him, "let us go in the house."

Marcia knew him to be a man who talked incessantly in redundant similes and metaphors if given an opportunity, usually vociferating more and more noisily as he

progressed. Because she was not in a mood to listen to his gibbering that morning, she had cut him short. On the steps of the veranda she stopped, and when she looked back she saw Garrish helping the young woman with the velour hat into his automobile.

"Who is that woman?" she asked.

"She is his secretary, ma'am. Mr. Garrish's secretary."

"I mean, what is her name?"

Phyllis had revealed her real identity only to Gracie, having been known as Mrs. Jones to the hospital people, Doctor Worth, and her Austrian neighbors—the Austrians still knew her by that name. Sober consideration of her position after her attempt at taking her life had been frustrated, had reconciled her to her destiny, and she yielded to the inevitable necessity of confessing her plight, the consequences, whatever they might be, she no longer dreaded to face. So she had long ago resumed the name of Phyllis Girard.

Coats had backed up against one of the stone lions that formed the copings on the low walls at either end of the steps. "Let me see," he puzzled thoughtfully. "I know her name. I'll catch it in a minute. It is right in my mouth—on my tongue, I should say." The thumb of his left hand was hooked under his chin and his forefinger was tapping his tensely drawn lips. Then he began stammering: "Gir—Gir—Gir—" When he caught the name he shouted it with a projectile burst of breath.

"Phyllis Girard?" Marcia asked.

"Yes, ma'am. Phyllis Girard. That's it. You're right, Phyllis Girard. I could never have thought of that name Phyllis."

Marcia turned and climbed slowly up the steps.

* * * * *

While Marcia went about her work as a politician, Blake regarded with misgivings the struggle he was waging to retain the affections of his wife, though he was too proud to come out into the open with his apprehensions. Pretty things, travel and position appealed to her. All of these could be acquired with money. Although Blake had always yearned for wealth, it now became the sole

object of his life. He suddenly discovered that he was by far the busiest man in Waverly.

With O'Day, who had become an authority on the feeding of sheep, but who possessed positively no other ability, he had assumed charge of the business Folsom's death had devolved upon them. Blake lacked the Folsom ingenuity to buy and sell, but O'Day gave the sheep excellent care and their venture resulted in even larger profits than under Folsom's shrewd dealing. This made Blake anxious to acquire the Folsom share. O'Day had only a small financial interest in the business, enough to keep him in the firm and enlist his conscientious efforts to have the sheep bring top prices on the market.

With the outlook encouraging, Blake was anxiously awaiting the return of Mrs. Folsom, confident that he could negotiate successfully with her. In becoming sole owner of the Waverly Sheep Feeding Company, a venture Folsom had undertaken years ago as an experiment, Blake could see his goal of wealth dimly in the offing. With riches he foolishly hoped to regain the affections of his wife. His inordinate desire to gain control of the business would not let him rest; he dwelt on it so strongly that for the time being he devoted almost his entire energy to this single transaction. Eventually, when the preliminaries of the deal were completed, he sent a telegram to Mrs. Folsom, stating his proposition, and very promptly received a reply from her, informing him that she accepted his offer. He gloated over his victory.

This rather minor success made him feel he had become a man of power, a colossus in his community, to which he had succeeded by dint of ingenious and industrious aggressiveness. Even though he had not been home for several days, his arrogance would not allow him to think of making amends to Marcia. His nights were spent at the hospital or on the road making long drives to meet professional appointments or to consult with colleagues, leaving the days to spend with his lawyer and financial advisers in connection with the consummation of the Folsom deal. It was with great self-satisfaction that he regarded himself as capable of centering himself so undividedly on a business transaction.

Marcia worried interruptedly, visualizing a multitude of things that might befall him when he did not come home. She worried as only women can worry, especially wives. Husbands worry sometimes, but usually not so much over the safety and welfare of their wives as they do about their behavior when they are not with them. Marcia found it quite easy, however, to convince herself that venial inattention and pressing business goes hand in hand. She was soon to venture on a political speaking tour that bade fair to become indefinitely prolonged, Willets having even hinted in his letter that he might ask her to extend her itinerary if the trend of events forecasted a close election, and she would thereby more than even the score.

"I've effected the biggest deal ever executed in Waverly!" Blake expatiated gleefully when he came home after securing Mrs. Folsom's signature to the articles that closed the transaction. "With the exception of O'Day owning a small part, just enough to make him feel he's obligated, I'm now sole owner of the Waverly Sheep Feeding Company. A mere two hundred thousand dollars involved in the purchase! I, who came here a dozen years ago as a mere upstart, at the head of the biggest business in town. Let me tell you, it requires no small amount of ability to engineer anything like that!" He talked while he strode about the room. He stopped abruptly to ascertain how Marcia was taking it; she was watching him apathetically, wondering how much of his exultant enthusiasm was really warranted. He thought she was enjoying it. "With Dumont and Folsom gone we stand in a fair way of soon becoming the wealthiest people in town," he continued. "I also have an option on the Folsom interest in the Waverly National. I can almost see my way clear to swing that deal, too." His eyes burned with the greed of acquisition. He dropped heavily into a chair at his desk and began making figures on a sheet of paper. Marcia watched him for a while, then left him to himself. Eventually, without looking up, he said, "In a few years we'll spend all the winters in Florida, won't we, Marcia?"

"Do you think so?"

When her voice came from the far end of another room, he gazed about in surprise. She was reading an article on *Adventures in Politics*.

Chapter XI

Either Willets' misgivings were groundless, or they had stimulated him and his colleagues into accomplishing a feat that was the envy of his rivals, the election having terminated favorably for him with a tremendous plurality. But there remained many problems to be worked out. Following closely the lifting haze of the election battle, there was another conflict, in which office seekers and those who were afflicted with petty jealousies took part. The inter-party struggle had shifted and was developing into the usual contention within the party.

But Willets was too cunning to jeopardize his prestige by openly taking a hand in factional strife, and he sat back amusedly, watching the favored, though over-abundant coterie haunting the successful candidate, who, through a desire to please all, and inexperience in this particular phase of politics, was plunging himself into a vortex of trouble by holding out hope, much of which was doomed to disappointment. Although frequently appealed to, Willets went about unmindful while this horde was savagely in pursuit of the appointments they presumed they were entitled to. The choice of any place in the cabinet was his, and until he had made his selection its formation must be deferred.

Despite his apparent apathy, his influence was a dominating factor in determining the facies of the cabinet personnel. Although he feigned impartiality, he had a definite leaning, which did not escape the notice of the man he had elected, and the selections were made as nearly as possible in accordance with what he indicated as his preference. But when the many minor appointments were considered, he finally broke silence and suggested Marcia's name for one of them, though she had told him it was not her intention to seek an office as compensation for what she had done. Willets was writing to her frequently, attempting to persuade her to accept some kind of recom-

pense, insisting that she must at least consider what he was offering her. She did consider, seriously, after which she found that to decline an official position in Washington was a far more difficult task than accepting it. She thought of her promise to Blake to refrain from further political campaigning. Then a happy thought came to her; this would not be a speaking tour, and it was that she had promised to forsake. This was something vastly different. In fact, there was no comparison between the two. A man like her husband, who valued publicity as highly as he did, should certainly not object to her attempt to advance herself. It was just as logical for her to presume this as it was for him to devote his best energy to business outside of his profession without remonstrance from her. Even if her aspirations did not meet with his approval, he could make concessions as she had in the past.

She would ask him; she would be mild about it, but ready to defend herself if he objected. Of late she had developed a restlessness that could not be controlled. It was yet a long time before the evening hour when Blake would come home. Her anxiety made minutes seem like hours, so, to while away the time, she went downtown. When she returned Blake had not yet arrived, but came an hour later, carrying a long carton of flowers under his arm.

"I saw the dandiest mums at Wasmer's as I came past," said he, giving Marcia the box, "so I got some for you. See if you like them. They're a new kind. A hybrid, so I was told."

As soon as he had given Marcia the flowers he busied himself removing his gloves and coat and hat. He was feeling guilty. But Marcia had not noticed him, as he feared she had, when he casually met Phyllis on the street that evening and had driven her home. The day was cold and Marcia had taken out Mrs. Folsom's electric—to keep limbered up, as Mrs. Folsom had suggested—and she was driving past when Blake was helping Phyllis into his car.

"How—unusually—thoughtful—of—you," said Marcia slowly, untying the box, puzzled over his actions. As she

raised the flowers out of the waxed paper, she added, "I'm awfully glad you came past Wasmer's, Don. These are beautiful."

"Uh-huh. They're the best I've seen this year."

"What kind did you say they are?"

"They're hybrids," he replied simply.

"Hybrids?"

"Yes. I don't think they have any particular name."

Then he became absorbed in the evening paper. Marcia secured water in a large vase and was very deliberate while cutting the stems of the dozen chrysanthemums and arranging them. This done, she pretended to find interest in some music she had purchased, but her depression overcame her pretense and she went over to where Blake was reading, seating herself on the arm of his chair, sighing heavily when her presence failed to distract his attention from an account of a government investigation. Over his shoulder she read the article he was interested in. When she had finished, he was apparently as deeply engrossed as he was when she approached him.

"Have you been busy today?" she inquired tentatively.

He looked up, startled. It was one of her former usual questions—one she had not asked for more than two years. Was it possible that after all the old trend of things was returning, those days when they could be in harness other than tandem and do splendid team work? He brightened, even if it was with forlorn hope.

"I've had a very full day," he replied.

"I like to hear you say that. Nothing else gives me quite the same assurance that you're content."

"Was kept on one big jump all day long," he continued. "Have been plumb swamped."

It was the passionate way he had of expressing himself when speaking of his growing practice that had long since caused Marcia to discontinue her inspiring curiosity in his ever-increasing medical and surgical following; but tonight she was inclined to encourage it.

"You're wonderful, Don, dear," she said, her praise sounding a little unnatural. "Your medical practice has grown year by year. It has never stood still or gone back.

That explains the kind of service you're giving. That's why you are so successful."

"There was a time when you often talked that way, Marcia," he said uneasily, unable to shake off a feeling of culpability because he had driven Phyllis home. "You haven't for a long time. Why haven't you?"

"I just did," she replied sweetly, smoothing his hair with loving strokes. "Didn't I, my dear?"

"Yes, I know, but you do it so seldom that it doesn't sound genuine any more."

"It's genuine enough," she said, looking down at him. "If you knew how much I love you, dearest, you'd know everything I say to you comes from my heart. Of course, if you don't want to believe it's genuine I can't help it. It isn't that—"

"Now I've kicked things over again," he hastened to apologize. "Too much work and too little play frays the nerves. Some day I'm going to get away from this incessant grind."

"I'm doing that next week."

"You are?"

"Yes," she said lightly. "I'm going to Washington."

"You are going to Washington?"

"You don't object to that, do you?"

He meant to rebel, but he had tried such tactics without success. After all, he could see no harm in her making a trip to Washington.

"No," he consented agreeably. "I have nothing against a trip like that for you—if it's arranged so you'll get some benefit from it."

"It's going to mean a lot to me," Marcia assured him. "To hold an office in Washington is bound to—"

"You take an office in Washington?" Blake interrupted her severely. "You must be losing your mind!"

She got up hurriedly. "Not precisely."

"Well, then, what are you talking about, you going to Washington to live as if we were permanently separated?"

"That is what suffrage for women does."

"Marcia, do you realize what you are saying? You can't. You must give up your plans; in justice to you and myself, I can't allow you to do anything like that. I

won't let you have your way this time. It would be—" Suddenly he caught himself. What would it gain him to rave? "You know it would be wrong of you to desert me the way you propose to do," he concluded weakly. "Now, don't you?"

"Men do it when they are elected or appointed to an office," she retorted. "Wives either stay at home or are resigned enough to accompany their husbands like subordinates! Why don't you go with me?"

"You know that's impossible."

"Then I'm going alone."

Blake remained silent for a minute. He was meditating uneasily. "Well, all right," he said, after a while, "go alone."

* * * * *

The remaining days of that week found Marcia making extensive preparations for her jaunt to Washington. Because she intended remaining away only a short time, just long enough to learn something about the official position Willets had offered her, it seemed to Blake that she was equipping herself disproportionately. The abundant, exacting, detailed arrangements puzzled him. As he continued to watch her, he was more and more inclined to believe that her plans included a wider scope than the mere ascertaining of the nature of her duties if she accepted the appointment. He had had a horror of her leaving him before he knew of her intention to do so; this seemed to be just an opportunity to depart on the pretext of attending to a business matter, when she actually had a separation in mind. She could be far away before anyone became aware of her real intent, removed from the gossip her action was certain to provoke. It was cleverly arranged to spare herself ignominy.

"Just what is the purport of this trip?" he eventually asked. "At this time? I would like to know. . . . The new administration does not go in until March."

"I have told you, my dear," she retorted with patient seriousness, "there are a few things I wish to investigate before accepting Mr. Willets' offer. I want to be sure the position merits my acceptance."

He stared dolefully at a large handbag Pansy was pack-

ing. The maid, ultimately finding it necessary to crush the carefully arranged contents closer together to make more room, while Marcia was constantly finding one more thing that must be included, looked up at him with imploring eyes. He got down and helped her rearrange it. Then, when at last everything was packed, and Marcia requested the maid to buckle the bag and carry it out, he did it for her. When he came back he said, "I've been trying to figure out how much compensation you'd demand for your services if you were accepting that Washington appointment as the means of a livelihood."

"It's not a question of recompense," she answered quickly, perceptibly perturbed. "I have my prestige to consider."

Blake scowled. "I don't think I understand you," he said. "Your prestige?"

"I've told you," she stated pertinently, "it's a business matter that is taking me there. One I cannot avoid."

"That isn't it," he disagreed. "You're not the kind of person who loses sleep over a business obligation. You're afflicted with a peculiar malady, for which the prognosis is very unfavorable."

She scoffed at the assertion. "What a terrible thing it would be if I should infect others with the singular disease!"

"You are not its sole victim," he explained. "I feel it myself at times, but reason helps me to control it."

"How interesting," she returned sarcastically. "Go on and tell me more about this new discovery of yours, please."

It occurred to Blake that she was jesting over his discomfiture. "Well, you're too dissatisfied for me to worry over you any longer," he drawled, yawning. "Do what you want! Have your own way!"

She laughed coldly, a habit she had very recently acquired. "You poor fellow," she said, going over to him and putting her arm around him. He tried to twist himself free. She pretended not to notice, and when he suddenly started for the clothes closet at the end of the corridor, she accompanied him. "You shouldn't expect

me to be different from other people," she continued. "Still my actions seem to worry you. Why is that?"

"Oh, hum," he said, putting on his coat. "Life's too short to chew the rag."

His indifference irritated her.

"I hope you'll recover from your apathy during my absence," she said. "I believe I bore you."

"It isn't so much you who is disturbing me," he told her, patting her cheek. "My business has been weighing me down lately, and the two—" He paused uncertainly. "I don't even remember why I'm worrying." Then, putting on his hat and gloves, he added, "I've got to keep hustling." He gave her a brief kiss and another pat on the cheek and hurried toward the door. "It'll probably be late before I get home tonight," he called back.

* * * * *

Upon her arrival in Washington, Marcia tried to feel she was in her element, but it was not long until factional hatred singled her out and trouble began. She became shockingly aware how uncomfortable a manifestly likable place can be. It was forcibly brought to her attention that the attempt to squeeze herself in somewhere outside of her realm was a mistake. The objectionable actions of a few malcontents influenced her against the entire population of Washington, for she had aspired to higher ideals than these people considered a proper standard to live by. Of course, a certain few of the Washington residents belonged to the usual exceptions. There was Lyman Curtis; he must necessarily be regarded as exotic to this maelstrom of humanity that was depending on cunning to net sufficient returns to round out a life of indolence. For Curtis came from Williston, was her sweetheart in days gone by, and was holding his official position more as an act of benevolence—as Willets was urging her to do—than for the reimbursement he was receiving.

Then there was Harry Willets, too new in the capital to have acquired bad habits. He was independently well-to-do, so it was obvious that he was indeed not hazarding the tranquillity of his bachelor life for the pittance his office was bringing him. It was possible that a few others

belonged in this accepted category, but careful scrutiny of those who frequented the most imposing hotels in the city revealed nothing that would substantiate such a belief. None had the qualifications of her two acquaintances. Nor did it seem that a search the world over could produce their equal.

That was Marcia's first impression of Washington. It was only natural that a feeling of repugnance should overtake her after her somewhat casual reception by strangers in a strange place. She had not been in the political game long enough to be accustomed to the disagreeable part of it, and she pondered long and petulantly over the unpleasantness to which she was being subjected.

Then, very unexpectedly, there came the beginning of gaities and adulations such as she had not anticipated. At first, when their party consisted of four—Mrs. Folsom, who was looking over Washington with a view of making it her home, Curtis, Willets, and herself—Marcia had lamented inwardly that their diversions were indeed tame enough. But after someone suggested that they invite others to join them, there was no longer anything to bemoan.

Marcia, always progressive but discriminating, indicated her desire to rub elbows with society. This was easily accomplished through Willets' influence and Curtis' acquaintance, and Washington now revealed itself as a place where society is not altogether composed of stiff-backed clothes models. She was surprised at the extremely good entertainers that abounded among what she at first considered alabaster personalities. And as there is no closed season on the idle in Washington, the class Marcia came in contact with, though her acquaintances also included a large number of seriously inclined folks, she was in a constant whirl of gaiety. This pleased her. It was a life that soon became as satisfying to her as the humdrum routine of Waverly had been wearying.

For Marcia to express a wish to Willets was to realize its fulfilment, if such was within his power. Marcia was one to whom he had never yet made a careless promise. He had won her admiration by quietly going about and providing what she desired, and he made himself still more

solid with her when she was invited to a really important social function, the forerunner of affairs to indicate who is in the select seasonal circle.

The entertainment in question was a reception given in the ballroom at the hotel where Marcia and Mrs. Folsom lived, to Congressman Crosby, from Marcia's home state, who had been married early the past summer and had just returned with his bride after touring Europe. Many notable functionaries were there, most of them coldly indifferent to Marcia's presence. Then she encountered Senator Soulsberry, the man who had awed her so at the convention, and whom she had regarded as a personage with tremendous influence in the social life of Washington. He seemed now disappointing. She was angry with herself because he had succeeded in misleading her so utterly at the convention, for here he was the perennial joke, trying to get on the *inside*. In his ability to win the senatorial election and getting on important committees, he was admirable. He employed this bewildering power quite effectively to compel the elite to be tolerant toward him, though he was regarded as a social tyro. Marcia only acknowledged her acquaintance with him because he came from Vermont, for his monopolizing affability was a source of embarrassment to her and of amusement to the rest of her crowd.

"I understand you are about to establish your residence here, Mrs. Blake," he observed with deep concern.

Probably Willets had nudged him, for he broke off abruptly and turned to Willets, who was frowning at him.

"She has not yet decided definitely," Willets enlightened him.

"I thought, perhaps, she had. Anyway, what's the harm of speaking about it—privately?"

Soulsberry had again committed the thing that had made him unpopular socially and feared politically. All of his associates and even his closest friends thought of him as being "mouthy."

"I'm still undecided, Mr. Soulsberry," Marcia said primly.

Then she shot a glance at Willets. If he must tell someone, why tell Soulsberry? Her steady gaze of dis-

pleasure caused him to be very uncomfortable, making him want to strangle Soulsberry.

"Senator Soulsberry is acting in an advisory capacity on appointments," Willets explained, trying to appease Marcia. "He knows the names of the appointees as far as they have been decided upon."

"Even in that case, I don't see the necessity of advertising my plans!" she objected sternly.

"Indeed not," Soulsberry assented, a little nervous as he perched his pince-nez on the point of his thumb. "I've told you a secret," he added, with a vindicating afterthought. "Very few are thus privileged so early. I assure you, I spoke with the best intentions."

"I might decline the offer, which would make it appear that you were misinformed," Marcia continued, relenting somewhat when Soulsberry showed concern over her displeasure. "And since I won't have anything like that, you have almost compelled me to accept."

"You haven't thought of not accepting?" Soulsberry asked.

"Yes. The general attitude here tonight has discouraged me."

"What attitude?" Willets wanted to know.

"Oh, everything!"

"I thought you were enjoying yourself. What has gone wrong?"

Soulsberry, like Willets, was a bachelor, but older and probably of a keener intuition with respect to women. He knew that right now Marcia was in a petulant frame of mind, and if he remained a tiff was imminent. A far-off gaze and a nod was his pretense that he had business somewhere across the room.

"You fight it out with Mr. Willets," was his parting shot. "He's to blame. He should have informed me."

Willets looked after Soulsberry in silence until he had merged with the crowd on the opposite side of the room.

"The mouthy fool!" he muttered.

"Don't excite yourself over a senator," Marcia soothed him. "Although he irritates me, he really is the least of my worries."

"Then what is wrong?"

"I think I'll go home tomorrow."

"Oh, Marcia, don't say that! Don't talk about going home before you've had some fun. It's just beginning. You've got everybody raving about you."

"I've been enjoying myself," she admitted, "but I can't any longer—"

"Yes, you can. You are—"

Marcia checked him with an impatient wave of her hand. "How can I when I'm worrying about Don?" she demanded despondently. "I've written to him every day since I came here and he has failed to answer a single one of my letters."

"Mrs. Folsom has a letter for you," Willets informed her. "She asked me to tell you about it. I'm glad you reminded me. I think she said it was from Blake."

"Let us see if we can find her—quickly."

"I think she is in the coffee room. She joined Senator Burkett and they went that way."

They started for the coffee room. Mrs. Folsom was chatting vivaciously with the widowed young senator when they came in. Marcia hastened over to her.

"Here is the letter you've been waiting for," said Mrs. Folsom when Marcia approached her. "Special delivery, too. I brought it down with me, knowing how anxious you were to have it."

The letter was from Blake, though the address, written in his hand, was peculiar. To receive a special delivery letter after days of disappointment and apprehension made Marcia's face turn white. Burkett fetched a chair for her, but she remained standing while she read. Reading the letter made her breath come easier and her heart lighter. When she had finished and looked up, the peach-blow tint returning to her cheeks and lips. Then, folding the letter and tucking it away, she sat down. When Willets looked at her inquiringly, she said airily, "I don't care to eat, but I want to do something amusing. The music is entrancing. Come, Harry, let's dance." They got up and glided away gracefully. When they were out of hearing distance from Mrs. Folsom, she spoke again. "I'm going to surprise you."

"You are! How?"

"I'm going to accept the position you have reserved for me."

He made no comment, but indicated his approval by holding her closer to him.

* * * * *

After that Marcia settled down to a routine of luxurious and delightful living. The only obstacle that had stood in the way of enjoyment had been removed, for she was hearing regularly from Blake now. In all of his letters he begged her not to hurry home because of him; he wanted her to remain and enjoy herself to the utmost. Nor did he give her occasion to ask him for money to defray her lavish expenditure, because every letter she received from him was heavy with it. No one ever tried to get ahead in Washington under more favorable conditions.

Her conciliatory and pleasing demeanor rapidly gained friends for her, and she was forever inviting people to visit her in Waverly—to come to her home the following summer. And everybody was coming; in fact, the list of acceptances had become so long that the thought of having to entertain so many people terrified her.

Sometimes we do things we did not intend to do. We play around the fire, as it were, till we get burned. This was precisely what had happened to Marcia. Irrepressibly progressive, always viewing possibilities with enthusiasm, quick to comprehend what a dawning opportunity had to offer, she had labored incessantly to lure as many as she could to Waverly. This, at first only an idle resolve, had now developed such a forceful momentum that it appalled her. When she could no longer alone bear the mental agony of her folly, she appealed to Mrs. Folsom, in whose resourcefulness she still had unlimited confidence.

"I've done something foolish," she confessed.

"If you have," said Mrs. Folsom dubiously, "it's the first time in your life that you ever did."

Marcia laughed ruefully. "I'm not as infallible as that. The fact is, I'm disgusted with myself. Don says I'm impulsive; he says that I fly at a notion but seldom do the things I really want to do. I believe he is right. Then,

too, I think I'm over-decisive. You know what I mean. It's hard for me to follow a happy medium in anything."

Mrs. Folsom roused herself to deeper concern over Marcia's self-consciousness regarding her defects. "What have you done that's so terrible?" she asked.

Marcia replied with an effort. "I've invited scores of people to visit me next summer."

"And everybody has declined your invitation?" asked the other even more woefully.

"You're wrong. Everyone has accepted!"

"Isn't that fine," chimed her companion. "I knew you'd make a hit."

"Yes," retorted Marcia, the responsibility weighing heavily on her, "it's just about knocked me out."

Mrs. Folsom laid her hand consolingly on Marcia's arm. "Don't you worry, dearie," she comforted her. "There'll be a way out of it. There always is. . . . In what way are you falling short?"

Marcia looked up thoughtfully. "I wouldn't worry if I had a house like yours to take them to. What will these people think when they find me living in a prosaic little cottage?"

"You're right. That's something to think about."

Marcia got up and crossed over to the window, where she remained gazing down into the wide street. Mrs. Folsom sat down again in her chair, but she made no further comment.

"I don't know what to do," said Marcia at length.

"It's possible," began Mrs. Folsom, attempting to lighten Marcia's burden, "that most of them accepted your invitation merely to please you and have no intention of ever coming to Waverly."

"I've thought of that," returned the other pensively. "But I must be prepared for the unexpected."

"Yes, I think you should be," agreed Mrs. Folsom. "You are safe in expecting at least a few of the old fossils to stop when they pass through."

"No one of importance ever passes through Waverly accidentally. They either come there for a purpose or they don't come at all."

"Well, take my word, a few of these promised visitors are going to be on hand next summer."

"I hope not!"

"There must be a way out of this. Let me think a moment."

"All right. Think hard. . . . I can't."

Mrs. Folsom became serious. Then she said, "I have it. Why don't you buy my house?"

"I buy your house!" cried Marcia mockingly "Why, you're suggesting the impossible!"

"Oh, well, you know what I mean when I say *you*. Be nice to Don and he'll buy it for your birthday present. Nothing is impossible."

"That's out of the question. Don told me just before I left home that he couldn't assume another financial obligation of any consequence this year. . . . How much do you want for your house?"

"There you are, worrying about the price, my dear—with a shrewd financier like Don for a husband. He may not be telling you about it, but, believe me, he's making a mint of money, or the letters you get daily from him wouldn't be bulging like a puffadder."

Mrs. Folsom was really anxious to dispose of her property, having decided never to go back to Waverly to live, and she could think of no one as financially able to buy the place as Blake.

Marcia wondered if it was worth the effort. A large house meant a great amount of work, more than she cared to worry over, and it was very doubtful if Blake was willing to employ the number of servants required to keep it in order. Deep within her stirred a strong response to Mrs. Folsom's offer, even if it meant the loss of a neighbor who had become almost a necessity.

"What will you do when you sell your house?" she asked.

"I am going to live here—here in Washington. I like this place."

Marcia sighed, her heart already heavy with loneliness; but if Mrs. Folsom was going to make Washington her home she was not losing her altogether—not for a while.

"I'm going home next week," she said. "Will you go

along to help me persuade Don to buy your house? You see, I still need you."

"I'll go if you promise to keep after Don until he makes the purchase."

"I'll do my best."

"Then I'm going."

* * * * * * *

A week after Marcia's departure for Washington, Blake was called to Phyllis' home to attend Gracie. He had not seen Phyllis for some time, not since the evening when he had taken her home and he had bought the chrysanthemums for Marcia. She alluded to it in a casual way.

"You hurried away so quickly the last time you were here," she pouted. "I wanted you to examine the baby. Gracie thinks he has adenoids."

Blake, after attending Gracie, let himself down heavily into a deep chair by the stove. He was recklessly extravagant with his time tonight.

"Where is he? I'll look at him now. . . . Oh, he's asleep. Well, don't awaken him. I can wait. . . . What's the trouble with your eye?" he asked.

Phyllis' eye was inflamed.

"I don't know," she said, touching it. "It began paining just this evening."

He got up. "Come over here to the light. I want to look at it."

Phyllis obeyed reluctantly.

"I don't think it's serious enough to require medical attention," she argued mildly.

Blake disregarded her protest, took hold of her arm and pulled her nearer the light. "Now hold still."

He turned the upper lid of her eye over a match, on which he had rolled some cotton, and inspected the slightly inflamed surface.

She drew away instinctively. "That hurts!" she protested.

"You have a marked case of conjunctivitis," he snapped a diagnosis, again disregarding her protest. He released her for a moment while he secured a dropper and dipped it in a solution in a vial. "Now this won't hurt," he as-

sured her. When she flinched as he dropped the medicine in the inflamed eye, he said laughingly, "You're scared. I know you didn't even feel that."

"Yes, I did."

"Just the coolness of the solution, perhaps."

"Possibly."

"Your eyes look badly."

"What is conjunctivitis?"

"It's an infectious condition of the mucous surface of the lids," he explained elaborately. "The prognosis depends on the nature of the infection. If it is very virulent it may terminate seriously. The only way to determine that would be to make a cultural growth of the discharge and later a microscopic examination of the growth. In a case like this, however, it is best to save time and institute active treatment at once. I'll telephone to Rook's and have them bring over a prescription."

The medicine arrived almost instantly. Blake instilled a few drops in the affected eye. He had now won her confidence completely, and his erstwhile rudeness had become a touch of deft gentleness and reassurance, making him her master.

Phyllis' boy had awaked in the meantime.

"Don't you worry over his health," said Blake after a cursory examination of the child's throat. "He's as sound as any youngster I know."

He threw himself idly on a lounge with the little fellow, finding interest in the jumbled sentences he was persistently concocting. Gracie groaned, and Phyllis, responding instinctively, hurried to her room, turning the light up slightly, and then turning it down again. For some time she remained watching the colored girl in the dimness of the turned-down lamp.

"She's asleep," she whispered when she came back on tiptoe. "It's the first sleep she's had in two nights."

Blake raised a cautioning finger. The child, still clinging to a pamphlet over which he had been intensely concerned, was unable, in spite of fighting tenaciously against it, to keep sleep away any longer. Phyllis took the boy up in her arms. In doing so, she incidentally grasped Blake's hand; he rose with her.

"How easy it is to—"

There he paused, as awkwardly as only Blake could pause. He had caught himself saying something he knew could not end as easily as it was said; he had begun to express his love for her with a sincerity that appalled him. Phyllis did not wait for him to continue; she hurriedly carried the baby to his bed, lingering to look after his comfort.

Blake was given time to think. The gravity of what he had intended to say grew even clearer to him now; he was not unscrupulous, for if he had been, he might have allowed himself to believe that it was an infatuation that was causing him to entertain a thought of love for Phyllis. He could not bring himself to again tell this woman that he loved her without realizing the full truth of his utterance, a thing that would be wholly unjust to both her and Marcia. When he perceived that he had been on the verge of committing something odiously wicked, he wanted to hasten away, never to return to that peculiarly alluring little house. If he were to tell her what his feelings were prompting him to say, the incident could easily develop into something more than a mere postlude to a professional call. It would be the positive turning of the way, and as such he had to consider it.

It had been different when he had told her months before that he loved her. Although at that time he wanted to be decent in his conduct toward her, he realized the gross falsity of his utterance even while he was speaking. It was not long before his ardor had cooled sufficiently to make him see the whole thing in the light of an attempted dissipation, such as people are liable to seek when life becomes unbearably dull. That was not love, and he knew it.

But this time he was certain enough of his emotion to regard the situation with profound apprehension. He had turned the matter over in his mind for weeks, at first not certain in which direction his desires were pointing, but they were no longer problematical. He knew that if he allowed himself to give full sway to the beckoning within him, there would be no room left in his heart for Marcia when she returned, the place that belonged to her entirely.

She was still his wife; he could never get away from the poignancy of that fact. His responsibility toward her was further substantiated by the fact that she had devoted the best years of her life to him, even though at times she had been a little negligent about his welfare. But he was aware that his own shortcomings very effectively counterbalanced any of hers.

"I must go," he said when Phyllis came back, clumsily putting on his overcoat.

She did not ask him to remain. He had hoped she would.

"How shall Gracie take her medicine?" she asked.

He fumbled through his pockets and finally succeeded in securing his prescription pad.

"I'll write the orders."

Minute after minute passed as the rasping of the pencil continued without interruption. It seemed incredible that so much could be written on such a small piece of paper. When he had finished, he watched Phyllis while tearing the sheet from the pad. She was arranging the medicine in the order that she had memorized it. He gave her the paper without a word, but waited to ascertain if she could read what he had written.

"Gracie is headstrong," said Phyllis when she had deciphered the peculiar script, "but I'll see to it that these orders are carried out."

"I know you will. Good night."

"Good night."

He went to the door and a moment later it closed on him.

* * * * *

When Marcia returned home some time later, Blake was under the domination of the same guilty conscience that had troubled him when he purchased the chrysanthemums. His attentions were so profuse that anyone with a temperament less variable than Marcia's would have been bored by them. She received them as a matter-of-fact, though they were something entirely new on his part. She presumed that it was possible that maturity was mellowing him. She rather expected Blake to be unusually attentive to her because she had trained herself

—or had her recent environment trained her?—to be regarded with indulgence, whether she merited it or not. Nevertheless, it was highly gratifying to see him exerting himself to please her, more than he had even during the first years after their marriage.

But Blake was working toward a certain point with a definite purpose—reunion. He and Marcia must be reunited if they were to continue to live in the same household. A mere better understanding would not suffice. Their marital relations had proceeded so far into divergent channels that it required something more tangible than dainty dishes and the radiance of an alluring fireside to bring them together again. He often recalled with regret the unpardonable mistake he had committed when Marcia attended the convention. Although there had been no visible deleterious effects, his medical experience was such that he understood how a philosophic mind like Marcia's could for the time calmly pass by an infraction of that kind and still store it away subconsciously for future reference.

It was by no means pure indifference that made Marcia carefree; it was her great confidence in Blake that made her so, and she would have been insanely jealous had she suspected he had designs on someone outside his home. She was so perfectly happy that she interpreted all of his actions as an indication that he was content with the way things were. His spasmodic irritability she attributed to the weight of his professional and business responsibilities. Their life was apparently one of negligent content. It was this trust that blinded her with respect to the protean occurrences that were transpiring before her very eyes.

After several days of ultra-subservience on the part of Blake, Marcia was encouraged to proceed with the business that was uppermost in her mind. Mrs. Folsom, after a reception which convinced her that after all she was really popular in Waverly, was showing signs of faltering over the offer she had made Marcia. It made Marcia anxious to have Mrs. Folsom open negotiations with Blake and bring the matter to a conclusion before changing her mind.

"How has your business been lately, Don?" she began when she felt the time was right. "You look tired."

"My practice is increasing every day," he informed her. "I'm thinking of employing two technicians for the clinical and X-ray laboratories. Worth has been swamped with work and it was necessary to give him an assistant." He now assumed an attitude of great importance and added, "Have I told you that I'm limiting myself to surgery and consultation?"

"You haven't!"

"Yes, that's what I'm doing."

"My! My! Think of the really wonderful progress you are making!"

He spoke suddenly. "Spending this winter in Florida sounds pretty good to me, Marcia. Both of us need a rest and we deserve a good time. There's no use of making a lot of money if we don't get any enjoyment out of it."

This was her opportunity.

"Don't you think, Don," she hastened to suggest, "that we should plan for a new home also—to go with the rest?"

"You mean build?"

"Not necessarily. We could buy."

"Where is there anything in this town you'd have?"

"Mrs. Folsom's house would suit me."

"She won't sell."

"She told me she would."

"You talked to her about it?"

"Yes."

This staggered him. He wondered where she got her tremendous ideas. Yet he had often hoped that some day he might be financially able to own that beautiful house. But when Folsom had purchased it a few years ago for close to one hundred thousand dollars he realized the folly of his dream. Even now, after years of business and professional success, he could not finance such a huge investment.

"Think of the work and care and worry a place like that involves. And I'm quite certain Mrs. Folsom doesn't care to sell. In fact, I know she doesn't," he discouraged her.

Marcia wondered what made him so positive. "Did she speak to you about it?"

"No."

"Well, she came with me from Washington for the sole purpose of selling us her house," she explained. "Your word is all that is necessary to close the deal."

Her determination made Blake aware of a cowardly nervousness for the first time in his life. What was she attempting? What was her motive? Was she trying to ruin him? He shuddered at the thought, for it was Marcia who was asking it, and Marcia could have no evil designs.

"If you've gone that far," he said, after a silent resumé of his financial status, "tell her we'll buy."

* * * * *

The Blakes eventually came into possession of the magnificent stone house standing on a dominating eminence on the north edge of town. A few years ago the place had been the center of social activities of the supercilious Dumonts, who had spent nearly a million to make droll Waverly a suitable place for them to live in. The house itself represented no small part of this prodigious expenditure. It had been built as the result of two separate stimuli: one came from the great manufacturer himself, the other from Mrs. Dumont. Through it Dumont proposed to impress the results of his accomplishments on envious competitors, while his wife had visions of becoming a successful society woman through the prestige gained as a hostess. They had been very successful up to the time when their son became an invalid, but after that they lost interest in society and no longer challenged business competition. Instead, they began traveling, seeking relief for their crippled child.

Before the time of Folsom and Blake, Waverly had known only one real business captain—Dumont. He was one of the few men who have been conspicuously successful as manufacturers in small towns remote from the sources of raw materials required by their industry, and because of his tremendous income he had not hesitated to lavish money on a house that was really out of proportion with a place like Waverly. Folsom had been suc-

cessful in a varied way, but his untimely death made it impossible to fully gauge his cunning as a financier, while Blake was still a tyro, who was gorging himself with so many business transactions that he was gasping for breath, but showing that he possessed the acumen to surpass anything his predecessors had done.

Coats was, as it were, thrown into the bargain, and when Blake took Marcia to look at the property soon after the purchase had been made, he greeted his new master and mistress with all the amiability that only Coats could display. As the old servant showed them through the house, Blake could see business advantages in the deal; his visions were much like Dumont's had been when he built the place, for even now he had forgotten what had originally instigated him to buy it—the possibility that it would cement the strained relations between himself and Marcia. What had served Dumont in a business way was also worthy of his consideration.

Marcia, too, had visions other than those that would increase the harmony of their home life. She could see shadows of past gay affairs all about her, a repetition of which she saw in the offing, except that instead of merchants and manufacturers, who came in hired hansom and barouche, her social affairs would be made up of politicians and artists and writers and other interesting folks who would arrive in sport-model automobiles and limousines.

"I know I'll like it here, Don," she announced enthusiastically. "Who wouldn't? This will make my life complete. Think of the truly wonderful happiness we can build here."

"That sounds more like my Marcia," he approved. "It's encouraging to know Washington is not monopolizing you entirely."

She smiled sweetly, having one thing in her mind while he had another.

"I'll give some elaborate parties. Some that will set the town wild," she promised.

"Uh-huh. I like parties," he replied, having a few of his local friends in mind. "Let me see, who'll we invite?"

"Oh, you can have a party of your own. . . . Some-

time . . . when I'm away . . . a stag affair. You like those."

He wondered why she thought he liked stag affairs. He had never attended a stag party in his life, so it must be mere conjecture on her part. She was puzzling. A thought came to him that made him stare at her in astonishment. Could this mean that she proposed to exclude him when she entertained? That was it! He could see through it clearly enough. There was no longer any doubt in his mind as to the true circumstances. The die was cast for the complete disintegrating of their domestic felicity. He was sagacious enough to know that when the love of a woman like Marcia has passed it is gone forever. Sometimes, after a break like theirs, people are reconciled, by honor and obligation, but real love is usually wanting; and there is only one thing a waning love can end in—separation. He came face to face with the truth with a shudder. The very thought of divorce was repugnant to him. People he considered decent did not get divorces. He had always looked rather askance at men and women who were divorced, and he had therefore been willing to grant Marcia anything in the hope that it would bring about a reunion with her.

"Yes, I think you'll like this place," he agreed, dazed. "And I want you to like it. I was afraid possibly you might still be dissatisfied."

"Why, Don, what makes you say that? You know that everything you do for me always pleases me."

"Then I wish you would show it."

His rather ambiguous retort made her furious. "Just what do you mean?" she demanded.

"That we don't understand each other. If we did—" He broke off abruptly and turned to face her squarely. She stared back at him. "Don't you see what it means?"

"Oh, dear me, yes!"

* * * * *

The following winter was not spent in Florida, but in the usual in-and-out way at home. Blake granted all of Marcia's wishes, though at times they had him at his wit's end, besides involving him in such indebtedness that his solvency became questionable. This spurred him on to

greater efforts to secure the necessary funds to meet the increased expenditure, and he finally began worrying constantly over his pinched financial condition, making him less efficient in carrying on his business and professional duties. For a long time he succeeded in keeping this from Marcia, but when his creditors began harassing him it threw him into a state of irritability, and she ultimately became aware that he was distressed. She made herself easy by presuming this was due to the pressure of professional demands, glad to let it pass at that rather than go through the inconvenience of threshing it out with him.

At present she was more interested in the big house than in anything else. After Coats and several expert decorators had worked for two weeks, the place was ready for occupancy.

With the arrival of the vanguard of distinguished visitors—Senator Burkett, who went to the trouble of detouring to Waverly while visiting at his home, and Soulsberry, en route to California, had called to see her—Marcia's hopes took new life, expecting this beginning to develop into a series of formal entertainments such as Waverly had never before known. With such a program in mind, it became obvious that a staff of competent servants was an imperative necessity. So, to determine the number and kind required, she called in Coats for consultation.

"Now, then, allow me to think a moment, Mrs. Blake," said the faithful old servant. "I could tell you offhand how much help is needed in this here—"

"Be brief, please," broke in Marcia. "Just name the different rooms. How many there are and so on. Begin in the basement and I'll write them down."

"The supply storage and fuel bin and—"

"Wait now," she interrupted him again. "I don't want to list those. Just give me the number of rooms in the servants' sleeping quarters—and take your time. I want to add some memoranda and a few details."

"Seven rooms and three, four, five—"

Coats was doubling his fingers as he counted, holding them crooked when he paused. Marcia was writing rap-

idly, but Coats was not ready to go on when she had finished.

"That isn't all," she said impatiently, looking up.

"Now, then, let me see," hesitated Coats, peering over her shoulder. "What have you there?"

"I have those you named."

She was waiting eagerly for him to proceed. Coats was apparently in deep mental agitation, again counting desperately on his fingers.

After a while he said, "Do you want me to numerate the closets and toilets and—"

"That'll do," she excused him curtly. "I'll do the checking up myself."

She started off to make a personal tour. When she had completed the list and allotted servants proportionately, she was shocked to find that according to her figures the payroll would include fourteen people. It staggered her. After much earnest endeavor she succeeded in narrowing it down to ten. Under compulsion of a restless conscience she cut it to eight. The number was still staggering, but her arbitrary reduction had already minimized the efficiency of a working force, and so, without further alterations, she took the list to Blake for his approval. It nonplussed him. Was she deliberately trying his patience? He studied the list a long time.

Then he concluded that if she was really testing his endurance he was going to show her he had an abundance of it to try. He secured his appointment book and catalogued the capacity in which each servant was to serve; he pretended to appreciate the valuable time she had devoted to the task of enumerating all of it, having taken the hint that his lack of interest in her affairs was displeasing. For Blake, his discussion was very mild, but disapproval seemed to be a necessity with him. As if in adherence to his custom of commenting unfavorably whenever a proposition involved the expenditure of a considerable sum of money, he remarked blandly, "A lackey to assist chauffeur. What do you mean by that?"

"A chauffeur is not adapted to catering to people as a lackey is. He will relieve the chauffeur of that responsibility."

"We haven't even got a chauffeur," he persisted.

"Well, the list shows that I'm thinking of hiring both."

"Couldn't they be dispensed with?"

Marcia frowned. "Not very easily. A chauffeur is a positive necessity, and there'll be a multitude of things for the lackey to do besides look pretty. Why, I think his services will be invaluable, and his presence will make a decided hit whenever we have guests."

"Then you must be planning a new automobile, also?" Blake inquired with curious interest, visualizing his serviceable sixty-thousand-mile sedan. "Are you?"

"Why, dear me, yes! We should buy at least two. But maybe we could get along with one more besides what we have."

"Your car has made far less mileage than mine. Can't you make it do for another year?"

"You know yourself, Don," she retorted with positive conviction, "it would be inconsistent with the other things we're doing to allow a five-car garage to stand empty or to occupy it with such contrivances as we have." Then she launched into a discussion of automobiles. There seemed to be nothing she did not know about motive power, gas and oil economy, tires, balanced frame construction, the advantages of a limousine, landau, sedan, cabriolet, sport-roadster, and all the other models on the market. Her knowledge regarding things in which she had shown no apparent interest previously was a revelation to Blake. She concluded with this summary: "And you know we couldn't have common, ordinary drivers for expensive, well-appointed cars such as we'll buy. They might ruin them."

He wondered how this determined little person had planned things; but he avoided a lengthy discourse by not asking for details. He had grown accustomed to her progressive ideas. He was beginning to enjoy them immensely. Also her inconsequential chatter, her gaiety and light-heartedness, the enthusiastic planning for big events, were alluring to him.

"All right," he assented, "hire and buy all you need."

Chapter XII

Late the following February, Marcia, accompanied by Mrs. Folsom, returned to Washington. Blake went about in a routine way to take them to the railway station in his own car. Although Marcia would have preferred to have him accompany her in her limousine, with a chauffeur and a lackey to serve them, no objections were offered when she saw that he wanted to be courteous. He drove slowly to enable him to keep up a rapid-fire conversation; now and then he perpetrated dry jests, and once he launched into a solemn expatiation of his own philosophy, about which there was nothing entertaining.

Although they had left the house early, it was necessary to wait only a few minutes before the train came thundering, creaking, wheezing up to the depot. A varied array of people poured out of the low brick building and moved toward the waiting train. Farmers and laborers mingled with pretty girls and smartly dressed young men from the city, who were returning home after spending a week-end with friends.

Before alighting from the automobile, Marcia gave Blake a fleeting kiss. She hesitated an instant when she had climbed out, then hastened toward the Pullman. He clambered after her and followed uncertainly a short distance. She seemed to want to get away from him, and he remained standing on the cinder platform, his gaze following her like that of a disappointed child. And when the conductor cried "Bo'd" it sounded like "Good-bye forever" to him.

The train began to move slowly. Marcia waved her hand and smiled at him through the window. When he waved back at her, a suffocating lump rose in his throat and he hastened away, as if from something he abhorred. Marcia, observing this, opened the window.

"Good-bye, Don," she called gaily.

He had by this time reached his automobile and climbed in.

"Good-bye," he called back, smiling with an effort.

Apparently the starter on his car failed to work, for he swung to the ground to crank the motor. After several mighty turns a great stream of white and black smoke issued from somewhere underneath the engine. The din from the worn mechanism was terrific; everybody about the depot was attracted by it, making Marcia feel embarrassed because she had ridden in such a "rattle-trap." She lowered the window quickly and became markedly oblivious to the bulky man and his rickety and patched contrivance. Blake's unconcern over the attention the noise had suddenly call to him, was a lesson for her nevertheless. Through it he betrayed his confidence that his position among these people was so far above reproach that he was unconscious of their ridicule. And when he flounced into the seat, waving a final good-bye as he drove off, she admired his integrity and stability in spite of a desire to find fault with him.

As Blake passed from view, Marcia became aware of an intense feeling of satisfaction to know how easy it was for him to allow her to follow the beckoning of her desires, almost forgetting that he had an altogether human mind, that was capable of resentment. Of course, she reasoned, he was aware that it was not through sheer self-interest that she was leaving him. He would derive an indirect benefit from it in time. A man of Donald Blake's perspicacity could see far enough into the future to discern returns from what she accomplished while in Washington. That was why he did not object more strenuously to her progressive ideas. She was almost inclined to consider him selfish to grant her the unrestricted privilege of seeking her own destiny.

When her thoughts came back from wool-gathering she found Mrs. Folsom had already succumbed to the comforts the porter offered. She was busy with reminiscences of the evening before, the hilarity of everybody at the party at Marcia's house, especially one Quincy Reynolds, on temporary leave from the staff of a Boston paper, but about whose status there was some obscurity. Her great-

est satisfaction in connection with her sudden infatuation for Quincy was the fact that it was securely a secret all her own. However, she must not dwell on it too strongly even in silent meditation, or she was liable to give herself away.

"You know," she said, when she saw Marcia studying her. "I didn't believe Don could be as entertaining as he was last night."

"He isn't nearly as attractive as Quincy," retorted Marcia.

Because Mrs. Folsom felt it her duty to concentrate faithfully on Willets, from whom she had received much attention before leaving Washington and many letters while she was in Waverly, this was quite a little upset for her. She knew that Willets' admiration for Marcia was the only thing that was keeping him from proposing marriage to her, and if she could bring Marcia and Blake closer together her designs on Willets would be that much nearer realization.

"That silly Boston boy is just a plaything for me," she said lightly. "But, coming back to Don, I think he is perfectly splendid in company. You ought to be proud of a man like that."

"I am."

"It isn't in Waverly alone that he's thought marvelous," continued Mrs. Folsom. "I heard several of your out-of-town guests commend him very highly with respect to his professional ability. His patients think he's a wonder!"

"So do I."

"And he can't be beat when it comes to entertaining."

"How interestingly you talk!" snapped Marcia, having in mind an Indian dance Blake had seen at a pow-wow while on a hunting trip the previous fall, a ridiculous parody of which he had given at her party. She was unable to reconcile herself to his provoking conduct. "I know what you mean—that his dancing last night was terrible."

"That was the best thing I ever saw him do. It seems incredible that a man of his bulk could be so lithe. It was simply enchanting."

There was a diabolical twinkle in Mrs. Folsom's eyes. It provoked stern resentment from Marcia.

"You're ridiculing him!" she protested. "I won't have it!"

"I wouldn't think of doing a thing like that, Marcia," Mrs. Folsom retorted. "My admiration for Don is too great to let me think of deriding him. But his nonsense is so clever that I couldn't help speaking about it."

For a moment Marcia was undecided; then her anger softened, for she concluded that Mrs. Folsom was really sincere when she lauded Blake. And reason made it clear to her that it was through her own lack of understanding that his dancing and nonsense appeared either vapid or preposterous to her, giving her a sudden feeling of pride to have someone praise her husband, the man she loved and had married.

About Blake's surgical and business ability there was no uncertainty, but it requires something besides an unlimited capacity for work and the mental and physical qualities to perform it with dexterity to keep the happiness of a home intact. He had all along been making a machine of himself, which had partly robbed him of the things that are an essential part of life itself. His business had made him a serious man, and when this sobriety was suddenly cast off for conspicuous and exaggerated frivolity it drove Marcia to the point of exasperation. But when Mrs. Folsom—she was the only one to offer comment on the incident—spoke favorably of it, she presumed that the offense was pardonable after all.

"Do you know," she began thoughtfully, "at times I feel I'm horrid to Don. . . . I doubt that I appreciate him as much as I should. I think he is wonderful and I tell him about it, but sometimes I wonder if he cares. He's so funny!"

"Why don't you have a better understanding with him?" retorted the other quickly, as if she had been waiting for the opportunity. "Don't make the big mistake of putting it off too long."

"What is there to understand?"

"A lot. Talk it over with him. I'm inclined to doubt that you two have ever had a real heart-to-heart talk."

"We used to have them when we were sweethearts," said Marcia whimsically. "But we've forgotten how."

Mrs. Folsom sighed. "You had better learn again."

"You talk as if Don and I were on the verge of estrangement."

"Well, I hope it isn't as bad as that."

"Oh, I know our life could be a little more pleasant and agreeable," Marcia admitted. "But I've tried my best to find out what's ailing him, only to be convinced that it's all so useless. We never get anywhere discussing the matter. It usually ends in silly quarrels. I believe that we are living about normally."

Mrs. Folsom knew that this was a misconception on Marcia's part, and that such a condition is a serious menace to a household. Yet there was little doubt that at times Marcia deliberately courted this kind of danger.

"Why don't you try doing nice things for him?" Mrs. Folsom suggested.

"That's where the trouble lies," replied Marcia carelessly. "He's so much more capable of doing things for himself than I am that it discourages me."

"I would try *something*," she insisted.

"What can I do beside what I am doing?"

"Don't you think he would gladly go with you on a trip like this if you invited him?"

"I'm sure he wouldn't," asserted Marcia seriously. "His work is of such great importance to him that he wouldn't leave it to travel with me."

"Have you asked him?"

"To accompany me?"

"Yes."

"I did when I went as a delegate to the convention. And I'll never do it again! So don't coax me!"

"You're too wise to talk like that."

"Sometimes brains are a liability," she retorted.

Mrs. Folsom saw that her efforts were useless, so she said no more.

"But I'm too young and pretty to indulge in thoughts that bring care lines," Marcia added a little later. "And my future is too bright to ruin with worry."

She had always found comfort in regarding serious

situations lightly. And as she settled back to greater comfort, making ready to read a magazine, Mrs. Folsom, watching the calm and lovely face, the intelligent, kindly eyes, wondered if a man like Blake was not deserving of a more steadfast companion.

* * * * *

Once again in Washington, Marcia immediately set about renewing old acquaintances and making new ones. This was easy because she had made a favorable impression on her previous visit there. This pleased her, for she was aware of the fact that the enterprise she had assigned to herself was still only in its chrysalis stage, although her determination to make Waverly a port-of-entrance for political aspirants had not diminished. On the other hand, she was encouraged in her venture because Blake had practically assured her his financial aid. He had spent a huge sum on backing the recognition to which she elevated herself, and she was confident he was ready to devote even more to the cause. She did not particularly like the idea of accepting his co-operation, for she wanted her achievements to be purely her own, much concerned over the possibility that reference might be made to her as the wife of Doctor Blake, of Waverly; but in her anxiety to gain her point, she considered it perfectly legitimate business to accept or even solicit his support. Nevertheless, her conscience troubled her a little when she thought of Blake being the power behind her throne; although financial prowess was really the most admirable attribute she could any longer discern in a husband.

For a time there was nothing to vex or grieve her. The world seemed devoid of annoyances. Then, unexpectedly, there appeared several sharp twists in the road ahead that upset the smooth order of her arrangements. Things were no longer harmonizing as they should; she had proceeded beyond the offing in her venture, as it were, and had begun buffeting the high, treacherous waves.

The position Willets had allotted her was undesirable in many respects. In the first place, it had no prestige behind it, the thing she most desired. As soon as she discovered this she took the matter up with Willets, think-

ing that this was all that was necessary to be transferred to a place where she would be influential. Although Willets listened with sympathy to her complaint, he had little encouragement for her except his promise that he would try and do something to make a satisfactory adjustment. But, after dilly-dallying a few days, he informed her there was nothing he could do for her in the way of a change; that all the appointments had been made and it was too early to accept resignation. The only thing he could do was to continue to exert his influence trying to make things agreeable for her. Instead of having bettered herself, her authority over her several subordinates now became nil, making her a mere figurehead in an office that had been created for the satisfaction of political parasites.

Sinister pressure, that seemed to arise from nowhere in particular, was also brought to bear on those to whom she must account, who in turn vented their displeasure on her. The atmosphere was steadily becoming more and more surcharged with criticism, making her position almost untenable. It was not long before Marcia became thoroughly convinced that Willets was in a position to sanction or reject what was favorable or unfavorable to him, and it was evident that she had come under his unfavorable consideration. As a consequence, she unconsciously rendered indifferent and inefficient service, something that would have been of small account had she still been in favor, but since she was not, she must weather a flood of severe censure.

For a time she worried along, hoping that Willets would be impressed with her self-reliance, only to find this method ineffective. He was still willing at all times to discuss her difficulties with her from all angles, pretending they were all a revelation to him, and that therefore he was innocent with regard to any humiliation she might be suffering. His unreserved partisanship, his glib reassurance that the infractions must and would discontinue, finally provoked her into open rebellion against him. This pleased him, for it was just what he had been waiting for.

"Tell me," she said, "what are you driving at?"

"I'm driving at nothing," he replied stupidly. "Why?"

"Yes, you are! Don't be afraid to talk to me. I'm not a child in arms."

"I know it. That's the reason we don't get along."

"I didn't know we were not getting along."

In his eyes there was an expression of intense longing. "I could easily get along with you," he said. "It's you who don't want to get along with me."

Understanding him now, she was overwhelmed with sadness, but she managed to laugh quite airily when she said, "You silly man. I am the most agreeable person in the world."

"You're a devil!" he blurted out. "A tantalizing she-devil!"

"Oh! Do you think I'm really as bad as that?"

She was laughing again, but he cut her short by springing to his feet. He came toward her, catching her in his arms. The longing look in his eyes had become a designing, covetous glower.

"Yes, you are," he said, his body quivering. "You've driven me insane! And, mind you, I won't give you up! I never will!" She fought him off as best she could. His hot breath on her cheek was repulsive to her. "If you would only love me a little," he continued, "I'd make you the envy of the country. I'd make you famous in society, in politics—here and abroad. There is nothing I wouldn't do for you. Can't you see how I want your love? How can you deny"

His voice drowned itself in an ugly groan. The violent, passionate exertion was too much for him; his arms relaxed and he sank slowly to the floor. The subconscious mind made his twitching fingers reach for something to cling to, and, coming in contact with Marcia's gown, they grasped it, pulling her down beside him. She was not frightened; this was the third time she had seen him in the throes of epilepsy since the automobile accident.

After a time he revived and his grasp relaxed; Marcia lifted herself into a chair. He gazed about stupidly, mumbling incoherently, then made a futile attempt to regain his feet. Unable to rise up, he rested his head on her knees and remained very quiet for a long time.

It was almost unbelievable that under this man's suave

exterior there lurked such brusque passion. What had inspired it? A multiplicity of other questions came to Marcia's mind. Had she known, however, that her all-pervading charm had penetrated his soul, she might have found it easier to excuse him.

"I'm a beast," he said eventually, turning away.

"You're worse than that," she said, pushing him from her.

"Call me what you will," he said brokenly, "and I'll admit you're telling the truth."

"That wouldn't rectify the irreparable hurt you've done me."

"May I ask you to forgive me?"

"It isn't that. It's the sneaking means you've employed to humiliate me."

"You're doing me an injustice," he protested. "I have never hesitated to defend you, though at times I was forced to yield and decide against you. Your progressive ideas conflict too seriously with sound politics. You must remember that the moment you go outside your realm you're infringing on the rights of someone else."

This was a revelation to Marcia. Her aggressiveness, although far-reaching enough to make people think and cause them to comment, was unrecognized by herself. But it was gratifying to know that her influence had attracted the attention of her contemporaries.

Willets staggered to his feet and sank heavily into a chair beside her, resting his head on the desk littered with books and papers. Marcia did not trust him. She felt he might be feigning, for she had seen him recuperate from these attacks in a few minutes, yet fully half an hour had elapsed since he had been stricken, and he continued to act stuporous.

She did not want to leave him before she was certain he had recovered sufficiently to know what he was doing. So, in order to forestall him if he should attempt another advance, she moved her chair to the opposite side of the desk. Except for sonorous breathing, that violently shook his body, Willets remained motionless, his head buried in the crook of his arm. Marcia picked up a pencil and began drawing an endless entanglement of scrolls on the

margin of a newspaper. She failed to notice that almost instantly his breathing had become easier, but a casual glance caught him watching her. Pretending not to have observed him, she continued to scribble for a while. Then, tossing the pencil carelessly on the desk, she got up and left the room.

* * * * *

That same day Marcia called on Lyman Curtis. Womanlike, she was seeking sympathy from someone she knew well. She had puzzled a long time before she could bring herself to do it. Willets, whom she had trusted so implicitly, had through his conduct shocked her almost into misanthropy. The wrecking of her confidence in a man whose companionship had been such a source of inspiration, whose character she had seen in such a noble light that she had innocently desired to pattern it, for which she hoped to owe no other recompense than her esteem, had robbed her of the loveliest and most delicate thing in the heart of a woman.

At length she found herself seated in the waiting-room of Curtis' office. He was occupied in an adjoining room when she entered; there was no attendant present to receive her, in conformity with an office whose incumbent is satisfied with the mere pittance he received as a weekly salary, because it permits him to live a life void of real responsibility.

The hum of Curtis' smooth, even voice, occasionally drowned by another, deeper and coarser, was the only indication that he was in. Eventually he maneuvered the man with the gruff voice into the room where Marcia was waiting. The man was big and indolently fat, towering above Curtis, who was familiarly holding his arm. But when Curtis observed Marcia, he became urgent to hasten the man's departure.

"Well, then I can depend on that?" the fat man wanted to know.

"Yes! Certainly, Bill."

"At what time can I see you?"

"Any time," said Curtis with curt impatience. "Good-day."

Marcia smiled. "Are you going to drive me out as you did that man?"

Curtis came hurriedly toward her. "I have something very interesting to tell you. Was just going to call you over the telephone."

"You have something interesting to tell me?" echoed Marcia.

"Yes. . . . Well, probably you've heard about it."

Marcia was thoughtful. "It's possible that I have. But go on and tell me. So many surprising things have come to me within the past few days that I'm really shock-proof now."

"Did anybody tell you anything about Mrs. Folsom and Willets?"

Marcia thought for a moment. She imagined she had heard quite a number of things about those people, but she did not want to delay hearing what Curtis had to say by making guesses.

"No," she said simply.

"Then you *don't* know." He seemed pleased because he was to be given the opportunity of being her informant. "Just heard about it myself."

Marcia's curiosity turned to impatience. "Well, what is it?" she demanded.

He pulled up a chair and sat down. "Mrs. Folsom is going to marry Willets," he said hesitatingly, as if still doubting the veracity of the one who had informed him. "Of course, that is heresay. . . . But it's good gossip—even if it isn't so."

"It's news to me," said Marcia, recalling Willets' attitude toward her that morning, "but I believe it."

"To tell the truth, I do, too."

"Who told you?"

"The man you just saw leaving here," he replied with a nod at the door. "Bill Reigel. You remember Bill?"

"I don't think I do," answered Marcia.

"He writes syndicated opinions for daily papers. He's the one who spilled the beans for Jimsey Woolford."

"So that's who he is! I don't remember of ever having see him before, but to be capable of playing the mean

trick he did on Jimsey, he'd have to look about the way he does."

"Yeh, Bill is one of those necessary evils," continued Curtis. "He came to see me on other business, incidentally telling me about Mrs. Folsom and Willets."

"How did he know?" Marcia asked pensively.

"Fellows like he make it a business to find out everything. I always slip him a little when he puts me onto something. He knows we are friendly, and I presume he thought the information was worth as much to me as anyone he knew of."

Marcia had up to this time been only mildly concerned over what Curtis had told her, but now felt a great wave of anger surge through her, and her pupils dilated until her eyes looked black. "Well, I have come to ask you not to be friendly with him any longer. . . . I mean Harry Willets."

Curtis countered with a request of his own. "I'll do that, but in return I'll ask you to stop associating with Mrs. Folsom."

"That's a bargain," Marcia promptly assented. Then she became vaguely conscious of what Mrs. Folsom's loss would mean to her, and she added, "I have figured her in everywhere in my entertainments next summer. But I suppose I must get along without her."

Curtis immediately advanced several reasons why Mrs. Folsom should be considered a liability rather than an asset.

"She has never," he began, knowing that Marcia still admired her, "ever since I have known her, worked for anyone's interest except her own. I believe your admiration for her has blinded you to that fact. You got along with her because you were not required to consider the material side of her friendship. My reasons for dealing with her were different. I could not afford to lose sight of the financial part of our transactions, but all the reimbursement I ever received for my services was promises and smiles."

Marcia listened in grave astonishment. Then the humorous side of it presented itself.

"That is the most serious-minded speech I ever heard

you make," she remarked soberly. "Why haven't I ever heard you talk like that before?"

He was about to launch into an explanation when he looked at the clock the Government maintained on the wall in his office.

"Come," he said, rising, "have dinner with me tonight. . . . Tra-la-tra-la-la-lala." He danced toward her, swaying rhythmically in harmony with the tune. He grasped Marcia by the hands, and, drawing her to her feet, danced her about the room with him. It was just the thing to banish her melancholy. He had enough of the frivolous life in him to be delightfully agreeable, the reason why she had never been adverse to his friendship, though he fell far short in other respects of what she thought a man should measure up to. As they continued to dance she regretted that Blake had never made it a practice to indulge in nonsensical antics with her. He had instead trained her to a life of dull sobriety, a life no one could continue to live indefinitely. Her pondering disturbed the smooth undulating movement of their dancing, and when they stumbled against a chair, knocking it over and breaking it, her imprudence made her think of home and Blake in a different way. To her he was the only man in the world who had no other than really admirable attributes. Curtis had suddenly become almost repulsive to her.

"We ought to be ashamed of ourselves," she protested.

Curtis was never disturbed by what anyone thought he should or should not do. "Let's go to the *Carstens'*," said he, picking up the chair and adjusting it. "I'm fond of their cuisine. They also have good music and a fine place to dance. It'll be fair for us to enjoy ourselves there."

"That'll be splendid," she eagerly accepted, trying to free herself from the oppression the thought of Blake had induced. "I want music, dancing . . . a lot of entertainment." Although she tried to appear gay, she spoke with an effort, her words coming with a sadness that was foreign to her voice. And when she experienced a constriction in her throat, she added, "In a week I'll be home, Lyman."

Curtis was not inclined to believe her, so he was not seriously concerned over what she had said.

At *Carstens'* they saw Mrs. Folsom seated at a table with Willets, receiving his undivided attention. Marcia observed them in silence, glad that they were unaware of her presence. Despite her avowed intention to be antagonistic toward Willets, she had rather hoped for a dignified reconciliation with him; but as she continued to watch them, she knew that any further assistance from him in a political way was out of the question. It pained her to realize that the major portion of her erstwhile supporting triumvirate was arrayed against her. Did this mean that all of her efforts had been misdirected? She now understood what a grave mistake she made when she failed to act on her own impulses. Willets' help, readily accepted because it was the easiest way to her objective, had proven to be a most serious detriment.

In desperation, like a drowning man reaching for a straw, she began a careful analysis of Curtis as a possible nucleus around whom she could build a fighting machine formidable enough to successfully cope with the one that sustained Willets. At length her decision was this: he was interestingly inconsequential enough to gain the plaudits of a certain class of people, and since delay was not desirable in her latest venture, he must do for a beginning.

She saw Soulsberry single her out and come towards her, and she made a quick decision to use him as her herald. She wanted him to hurry, fearing she might forget part of her plans if he was detained, but he suddenly shied off in another direction and seated himself at a table far removed from her.

She was glad he had been attracted away when she realized more time was required to perfect her plans to the point where she would be ready to divulge them to her friends. So far the most gratifying thing about her new project was the knowledge that she was as persevering as ever when forced to rely on her own resources, having become uncomfortably aware that she had submitted to laxity when her scheme was manifestly working out so smoothly under Willets' management.

"Let us dance," she suggested at length, putting aside her fantasy for the time being.

They got up and merged with the other dancers.

"You dance beautifully," said Curtis, as if he had just found it out.

"Yes, very beautifully," she mimicked him.

He gave her a reassuring little hug, which put them slightly out of step. "You do!"

"Let's try and not break any more furniture."

"I don't care. It isn't mine!"

They danced on.

Mrs. Folsom and Willets had left when they returned to their table. Marcia became conscious of something puzzling; the departure of Mrs. Folsom and her companion seemed to have inverted the place; it was stripped of all that had given it warmth and charm.

* * * * *

Marcia returned home determined to carry out as nearly as possible her program as originally outlined; as there was much to think and worry about in connection with it, she went to work immediately, with a zest that had always been an attribute of hers. For a while, when she received nothing but rebuffs from people who had always been her friends, she lacked the courage to carry through her plans. The hurt inflicted was an acute, almost a physical pain, as though a vital part of her was being cut away. She lost sleep over the situation, but finally decided that she could not retreat; it was possible that she would be returned to favor when she demonstrated her power by converting a fantastic notion into something tangible.

She found the servant situation in her home distressing. She tried in vain to restore order among her staff, and it was only after discharging three of the most arrogant, including old Coats, that her attempted discipline was finally effective. There was evidence that shameful occurrences had taken place in her home for months, and when she called Blake's attention to it, in a sense of reprimand for having allowed it, he remarked sullenly, "I never thought you'd be so negligent with respect to your house."

His reply made her wish she had tolerated in silence the infractions the servants had committed.

She had entered his private room unexpectedly, finding him at his desk busy with a stack of paper. Her unceremonious appearance annoyed him, much as when a wild thing is approached without warning and finds itself at bay. He threw his big arm over the papers, covering them completely, with the exception of one, on which he had evidently been concentrating his thoughts when she came in, the trend of which he obviously did not want to break.

"I have no one to blame but myself," she admitted. Then, becoming mildly vindictive in almost the same breath, she added, "but it's appalling how few people can be trusted nowadays. My confidence was misplaced—and I shouldn't be blamed for that."

"If I dwelt as continuously as you do on the seamy sides of people's characters, my reason would waver!" he retorted fiercely.

Marcia was afraid to speak again. Even the stern lessons she had learned in the pitiless school of politics had not hardened her enough to make her feel safe when he was in this vicious mood.

His unusually violent temper made her hesitant about going through with the entertainment she had arranged for that night. In order to find out how he felt about it, she invited him rather dubiously to attend.

"I wish you would take time to be present tonight at the first of a number of entertainments I am giving," she said, trying to appear calm. "I'm going to have guests from Washington at a dinner-dance."

"Entertainments!" he snapped. "I detest stilted entertainments!"

"This'll be a jolly affair. I've also invited some of our friends from here."

"So you have condescended to mix with locals, eh?"

"Yes. Dean Drake, Booky Walton—"

"Oh, damn!" he shouted. "Stiff backs, cold stares, sickening smiles. . . . Yes, it'll be lovely!"

"Really, don't you like parties?"

"Not that kind!" he replied vehemently. "And you know it!"

"It's because this is something new for us," she insisted.

"I know I am an old fool," Blake accused himself, his temper cooling. "To attend a swell affair is not the thing for a big, cumbersome, country bumpkin like me."

"That's just imagination on your part," she objected, gaining confidence as he showed signs of giving in. "You're making it almost impossible for me to get along with you any more."

"Whose fault is it?"

She was actually undecided. "Well, I don't know."

"It's yours," he accused her. "Sometime ago you indicated you didn't want me at your parties."

"This is an awful life!" she wailed.

"Isn't it! It's a shame to live the way we do!"

There seemed to be something gnawing at the very soul of the man.

"And don't forget," he added, "someone's got to make the money to pay for your celebrations."

"Why, Don, you told me you were rich."

"That was some time ago. Let me tell you, if you're going to keep on flying high I think I'd better stick right to the business of making money."

She refused to believe that he was serious. A man who had as much money as Donald Blake could not complain about her expenditure and be in earnest. She laughed with a splendid effort, trying to show that she appreciated his humor.

"I suppose we'll go bankrupt if you don't."

Blake was sullen. "You regard a solemn fact as a mere myth."

"You are really funny, Don," she said, laughing again. "Is pleading poverty your way of dodging the income tax?"

He felt somewhat guilty over this. "You don't know the circumstances," he said thickly. "I'm glad you don't, or there would be hell to pay."

Marcia wanted to fathom his profane dejection, which persisted in spite of anything she attempted, but it might

upset her plans for that night if she became worried. It was so easy for him to fly into a violent tantrum. And not being in a very cheerful mood herself, she declined to pursue what she considered a meaningless argument that was certain to precipitate a severe clash if she insisted on getting to the bottom of it.

She threw her head back with a quick, short jerk, and hurried from the room, leaving him sulking over the papers he seemed to value so highly.

* * * * *

The affair that night was a success as successes go. There was much to be elated over, especially for one who was as keenly conscious of the many favorable little occurrences as Marcia; in all the trivial twists and turns she could discern indications that meant real social triumph for her in the future, which would lend invaluable aid to her political aspirations.

But before she had reached the point when she and her guests were gathered about a long, elaborately decorated table, she had encountered many vexing problems, which made her wish that her ambitions had never gone further than a desire to marry and live in a cottage and be the mother of several children.

One of the most exasperating things had occurred in connection with the servants. She had depended on her new butler, Halliday, in whom she had such confidence, to handle the preparation and serving of food, forgetting that she had selected him at random from the group in her employ after her discipular readjustment, and that he had never served in this capacity before, and was not to be relied upon too implicitly. When she asked him regarding the arrangement of the dinner course for that evening, he informed her blithely, "Nothing has been arranged, ma'am. I have been waiting to hear from you."

"I'll help you with it," she said, subduing a desire to rebuke him. "How is the cook getting along?"

"He's also waiting for orders from you, ma'am."

"Has nothing been done?" she asked angrily.

"Nothing, ma'am."

Marcia looked at her watch. It was past four o'clock. She knew now that a household of uniformed servants

is not as pleasant to deal with as to look at. Their deportment, she discovered, is strictly in ratio with the watching, driving, and guidance they are under. Her anger made her speechless, yet the things she wanted to say were heaping up in her mind, eventually compelling her to burst forth with something.

"You blundering idiot!" she exploded. "Why am I paying you?"

Halliday seemed unaffected by her rage. "To do what I am ordered to do, ma'am," he said, standing erect and without the slightest tremor of his body.

"Then why don't you obey orders?"

"There were none," he returned quickly, with a single sideward turn of his head. "None whatever, ma'am."

"Are you unable to think for yourself?"

"It isn't customary for a servant to take the initiative, ma'am—not a good servant, unless privileged to do so."

The butler's retort had a deep significance for Marcia. It occurred to her that possibly she was incapable of managing a household of servants; so she decided to go slowly and learn from Halliday.

"All right, Halliday," she relented. "My scolding isn't going to do the work. It's my fault as much as it is yours because nothing has been done. I am sorry I was hasty. I shouldn't have spoken the way I did. Come, we have yet time to redeem ourselves."

Together they went to the kitchen, the butler looking down at her from his great height, smiling contemptuously.

* * * * *

The early part of the dinner was devoid of anything that might indicate a merry evening. Marcia recalled what Blake had said about "stiff backs." She was chagrined by the fact that her gathering included no one of real prominence. Marcia found relief from despair only through the excellent service rendered during the meal by Halliday and his assistants.

The party seemed doomed to flat failure, until former Governor Goodrich, now Senator Goodrich, instilled some life into it by liberal allowances of home brew from his own private stock, which he distributed lavishly among

the guests and the members of the orchestra which had been engaged to supply music for the dancing.

The whole party immediately became infected with the abandon of the gin-inspired music, and the party soon assumed the appearance and behavior of a bacchanalian revel. Booky Walton, Waverly's investment banker and recreatively an authority on art and literature and an organizer of amateur theatricals, was inspired to band the company into a musical comedy chorus with decided emphasis on that institution's less desirable and admirable stunts.

About midnight Blake came home—worried. Although he had stubbornly refused to attend Marcia's party, he could not help being interested in it when he saw how elaborate had been her arrangements. He decided to find Marcia, and if she was willing, he would yet take part in it, pretending he had been detained by professional duties up till now. Everybody seemed to be in the living-room, from which there issued sounds of noisy applause, whoops and laughter, dying away into a low hum of voices.

Blake went to the door and surveyed the room with a sweeping glance. The first glimpse he got of the gathering thrilled him. These gay people made him feel good. As he lingered unnoticed at the door, he felt impelled to go in and announce, "Well, here I am!" But at that moment there was an expectant hush and everybody quickly found seats. There followed a little soft music, a little whispering, a little giggling, suppressed coughs, all of which was now and then drowned by the sound of a deep, drawling voice. Then there was a craning of necks toward an improvised stage at one end of the room. The curtain swept back, revealing a funeral bier, on which reposed a woman, whom Blake recognized as Mrs. John Berthold, the wife of a railroad superintendent living at Williston. Dean Drake, attired in a travesty of a Shakespearean costume, now made his appearance on the stage, pretending he was at the point of exhaustion from the violent struggle he had had to reach the side of his beloved. He pressed a long, ardent kiss on her lips, then drank the death potion from a whisky flask he drew from his hip pocket. Dean died instantly. Immediately

after he had succumbed to the deadly poison, the woman revived and began shrieking frantically when she saw what had happened. She rushed to his side and took a draught from the flask, then kissed Dean several times and again put the flask to her lips, collapsing an instant later over his prostrate form.

Their interpretation of Romeo and Juliet was a very amusing farce, but Blake could not approve of a single man kissing another man's wife for the entertainment of a crowd. He would not remain to see Marcia subject herself to anything so ridiculous, and he left the house as quickly as he could.

The effusive sorrow Marcia expressed because Blake had found it impossible to attend her party, the telling of how perfectly lovely it all was, nettled him. Although he did not tell her what he had seen of it, his lack of enthusiasm over her wonderful affair was enough to warn Marcia not to keep referring to it too persistently.

* * * * *

For many weeks Blake maintained a surly attitude, much like that he had shown upon Marcia's return from Washington. He no longer conjured up excuses for his absence from home night after night, as though his obligations toward her were at an end. Marcia might have been concerned over this had she not been too deeply engrossed with wild scheming to crush Willets to regard his actions seriously. Only occasionally would she lapse into domesticity long enough to try to fathom his peculiar mental state.

Of course, Marcia was not altogether to blame for their lack of co-ordination. It was useless for her to ask Blake to confide in her, as he invariably flared up whenever she expressed her willingness to share his difficulties. This usually aggravated Marcia's none too even temper and the question would be put aside until his morbidity became more intolerable than his flare-ups, when there would be a repetition of Marcia's attempt to bring about a better understanding.

Then there came a period when Marcia ruthlessly brushed aside everything to clear the way for social triumphs. House party followed house party. Most of

the time she had people from Washington in her home as her guests. Even her wildest dreams were being more than realized. When she reflected on her association with Mrs. Folsom, it was evident that this had been a drawback rather than a help to her, for she had never met with such success when Mrs. Folsom had taken part in the arrangements.

And just when it seemed her efforts in Waverly would end in a blaze of glory that was certain to follow her to Washington, something happened. She received notification from the capital stating that after an investigation of charges filed against her it was deemed advisable to ask her to resign her position. For some time she puzzled over it, at length finding relief by attributing this political turn to her increasing power. She thought it was an indication that her opponents regarded her with fear, which made them resort to desperate means to curtail her activity, and she considered the demand an achievement rather than defeat.

But the temporary upset brought about by her opponents in Washington did not have time to subside when she was dealt a second and far more terrific blow. Blake, instead of having spent his time in consultations and performing emergency operations, as he had told Marcia and as she had believed he was doing, had devoted his time to Phyllis. And after weeks of unlicensed love there had come the inevitable day of reckoning.

"I want you to give me my freedom," he demanded abruptly after a day of extreme dejection, as if the thought had struck him suddenly. "I want to be free. I am going away. I'll never bother you. You can have everything I've got. I don't want a single thing. Just let me go."

Marcia was dumfounded. A terrible weakness crept over her body.

"What is it?" she gasped. "What do you mean, Don?"

"That you must give me a divorce," he said huskily.

His serious mien left no doubt as to his intentions. It stupefied Marcia.

"Wh—why," she faltered, "why do you say that?"

"You know," he replied, "there can only be one reason for it."

"Then you care for someone else?"

He nodded his head. "Yes."

"Oh, Don! Oh, Don!"

She could say no more. Her eyes welled with tears and she sat down and buried her face in her hands, crying bitterly. Blake stirred uneasily, sorry for her; but he was determined not to allow his sentimentality to alter his decision.

"I cannot believe it," she sobbed. "Not of you, Don."

"I owe her an obligation and I propose to take care of her."

"Why don't you think of your responsibility to me? I am your wife!"

"Heaven knows I've thought of that!"

"Then how can you say what you did?"

"My obligation towards her is deeper than any I owe you. Don't you understand?"

Marcia straightened up. A defiant gleam shot from her moist eyes. She considered for a moment. She did comprehend.

"Well, you shall not be with her! I refuse to release you! My duty as your wife, my pride, my love for you, all forbid it."

"Marcia"

"Don't plead with me!" she interrupted him. "Whoever this woman is, she must suffer the consequences of her indiscretions."

Blake nodded his head. "That, I suppose, is final?"

"You shouldn't have any doubt about it, knowing me as well as you do."

"I just wanted to know."

Chapter XIII

To become practically a penniless beggar in a strange city, far removed from friends, a hunted man, no longer daring to follow his profession, in fact, to face a new beginning for a life already forty years spent—this was the problem that now confronted Doctor Blake.

His hasty departure from Waverly during the night with Phyllis Girard, the woman he loved, but whom the law denied him, necessitated the forsaking of many of the things that might have added to his comfort. Had his desperate move worked out with anything like a semblance of the way he had planned and visualized it, their tribulations might have been more endurable.

He had made the mistake of not taking time to consider that some disastrous twist was liable to occur in connection with the course he had decided to follow when Marcia refused to give him the freedom he wanted. But to be robbed by highway bandits when his automobile stalled after he had driven something like two hundred miles, was something he could not have foretold had he schemed and prepared for months. It changed everything. Not a single plan he had made could possibly materialize now.

It was only through his remarkable resourcefulness that he was able to proceed further after the bandits left him destitute by the wayside. For several days he trudged with Phyllis and her boy along the country roads, carrying their scant luggage. In the pockets of Blake's coat there were a dozen or more intaglios and cameos of his earliest cutting; these the bandits had overlooked in their haste to get away, or, perhaps, they had not recognized their value.

The three were the weariest pedestrians imaginable at the end of the third day. They had found it necessary to follow a railroad, the highways being mucky from heavy rain during the night. The boy seemed to stand traveling

by foot the best of the three, undoubtedly due to the fact that he was allotted the largest portion of the food they had had courage enough to beg once or twice daily.

Near the end of this day of heavy plodding, with no hope of anything better than a hand-out to eat and a bed in the dampness of the open world, they encountered a villager with an interest in intaglios, to whom Blake sold several of the stones of his finset cutting for a rather insignificant sum.

"Just my luck," he complained. "That fellow wanted intaglios and nearly all I have are cameos."

Phyllis tried to cheer him. "Perhaps the next one will want cameos."

But after that traveling was easier, for they could now buy something to eat.

As if this bit of fortune had created an incentive, Providence manifestly took a hand. The following day Blake was able to give expert attention to a farmer who had suffered a fall from a high scaffolding erected for painting his barn. Since the farm telephone line was out of order, the family were at their wits' end trying to summon a doctor quickly. Blake volunteered his services, telling them not such a big lie about being a traveling doctor, and the leg was set in a crude but effective way.

The farmer lamented when Blake told him how long he would be disabled. In that case the painting of the barn would have to go over until the following summer—and it needed the paint badly. Blake saw a double opportunity to make money if arrangements could be made whereby he would finish the painting for him. Since the eldest boy in the family had suggested it would be best to have the doctor who reduced the fracture remain to give it his subsequent attention, it did not require much bargaining to obtain the job.

In three weeks the bones were united sufficiently to permit the removal of the splint without danger to the patient. Having finished the work on the barn, as well as having put a new coat of paint on the house, and being desirous of moving on, Blake hurried the removal of the splint, cautioning the man to remain quiet a few weeks longer.

Although Blake was not inclined to be mercenary, he knew that his remuneration would be forthcoming as soon as he pronounced his patient able to get along without him; and it required money to make good his escape. After all, he was now only interested in the reimbursement the matter involved.

When a computation was made, it was discovered that he did not have money enough to buy railroad tickets for the city that was his coveted destination. In spite of this disappointment, it was nevertheless highly gratifying to journey a thousand miles on a fast train. Indeed, it was the most welcomed ride he had ever taken.

Because he had been in the habit of frequenting the drug store in his own building in Waverly, where he had a business interest and his prescriptions were filled, he proceeded automatically, a few hours after his arrival, to do the same thing in the city to which he had been brought under such strange circumstances. The store was small, but it was well stocked with the best merchandise. The fixtures were elaborate and the clerks were veritable machines of urban courtesy. Blake could easily understand why this store had a large patronage, for he was enjoying the atmosphere of the place enough himself to want to return often. It gave him a feeling of peculiar security, which allowed him to relax for the first time since leaving Waverly.

He had idled about the store only a little while when a small man, with mutton-chop whiskers, wearing immense shell-rimmed glasses, came in and bustled back toward an elaborate desk behind the prescription case. He hung the brown derby hat he was wearing on a hook, fussed a little over some mail, then looked up, manifestly ready for business. He first beckoned to the fountain man, who answered the summons of his employer reluctantly. Their business was discussed inaudibly for a few minutes.

"How many times must I tell you that you're discharged!" suddenly shouted the proprietor. "I want you to get out! So don't argue with me!" Turning to the cashier, he went on, "Figure up what's due him and give him a check, Madge. Please be quick about it and get him out of here!"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Dover," replied the girl in the cage. "Here you are," she said a moment later, handing over the check. "I think you'll find that's right."

The man snatched the paper and crushed it in his fingers. "I know it is, Madge." Then, turning to his erstwhile employer he addressed him insolently. "Don't think for a moment that you're kicking me out in the cold. I could own this place if I wanted it. But for reasons of my own, I've already got a job on the next corner, see!"

"Get out!" shouted the druggist, waving him toward the door. "Get out!"

And when the door had closed behind the clerk, Jonan Dover was sorry he had lost his temper, for it was near the time of the evening when the soda business was at its best, putting him very much in need of a clerk.

"Gurdon," said Dover when two men came in and seated themselves on stools at the marble bar, "will you wait on the gentlemen?"

Blake hurried toward the proprietor. "Do you want to hire someone to take the place of the man you just discharged?"

"Are you looking for a job?"

"Yes."

Dover estimated him carefully from head to foot, as if trying to compute the loss of energy involved when such a ponderous body took to serving soft drinks and light lunches.

"Have you had any experience along that line?"

Blake recalled with difficulty that he had dabbled in such work. The druggist had given him a key to the drug store at home, to enable him to fill emergency prescriptions at night. The best use he made of the key was when he returned late from country drives and he invited the man who accompanied him on these trips to partake of a lunch he fixed. Once, while preparing egg drinks and sandwiches, he had remarked that it would not be amiss to presume he could earn a livelihood at the job.

"I have," he said.

"What is your name?"

"Joel Carmody," he instantly invented.

They talked a little about wages.

"All right, Joel," said the druggist. "I suppose you'll do, if you'll go to work at once."

A few moments later the former Waverly surgeon was catering to the public in the capacity of a soda clerk.

* * * * *

Blake had secured quarters for Phyllis and himself at a cheap downtown lodging house, consisting of two housekeeping rooms; but as it required more money to procure supplies to prepare a meal than to buy it, they had gone to a nearby restaurant for their supper. He had spent the greater part of his last dollar on the meal, after which he had sent Phyllis back to their rooms.

When he returned to the lodging-house that night, Phyllis was waiting for him; although she did not say anything about it, the anxiety she displayed over his prolonged absence showed plainly that her confidence in him was very shallow. Had she presumed he had gone off and left her? Heaven!—the utterly lost feeling that came over him! Then, when she seemed to have eased her mind, she forced a smile.

He gave her a bundle he was carrying under his arm, saying, "That is our breakfast."

She smelled the package childishly. "Oh!"

Blake was ashamed of himself. It was not in him to bring in a meal as a cat brings a mouse to her young. At home this would have been his way of jesting. Phyllis untied the parcel and took from it a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese. Where had he foraged it?

"Our breakfast!" she said, more to herself than to him.

"It's the best I could do," he said soberly.

And now there came to her for the first time the seriousness of it all. At length her curiosity got the upper hand and she asked, "Where did you get this?"

"At the Dover Drug Company. . . . I'll return it when they pay me. . . . I'm working there."

"You are working?"

"Yes," he said hesitantly. "I have charge of their fountain."

Everything he said was a surprise to her. "Working at the—"

"It's the best I can do," he repeated, ashamed to admit it. "For the time being," he added.

Phyllis' admiration for him was without limit. Where in all the world was there another man with his dauntless courage? A person of his caste stooping to provide for her! It was incredible!

He was in the meantime visualizing her opinion of him quite differently. What must she be thinking of him? It was only a few weeks since he had left his native haunts, still his destitution was such that he found it necessary to purloin enough food for a meal. How was she interpreting it? As for himself, he felt he was lacking in ability.

But it was not long before she showed that she had already joined him heart and soul in fighting a common battle for sustenance. His tribulations were her own; there was no demarcation where his obligation ceased and her duty began—it was all one.

* * * * *

Marcia waited several weeks for Blake to return, hoping that the impossibility of his escapade would become apparent to him, when he would come back or at least write to her and affect a reconciliation in that way. His friends and the servants were informed that he had gone East for a special course in surgery; the duration of his absence was indefinite. Then, when some of his patients demanded to know definitely about his return, she knew it was useless to hold out hope that was doomed to disappointment, and she told them he was seriously ill in Europe and that she was going abroad to be with him. Instead she went to Washington to put into execution her threat to apprehend him under the Mann act.

She kept the intent of her plan from Curtis, filing her charges with Calvin Minter, at the head of a branch of the department of justice in which Curtis was employed. It was only through her influence and friendship with Minter that she succeeded in having her complaint considered by him.

"This should be filed in the district in which you reside," he informed her. "I must ask you to do that."

"I am a resident of the District of Columbia—now."

"Your legal residence is Waverly."

"I know," said Marcia, "but you will deviate a little from the usual course for me."

Minter adhered to official obstinacy. "It will complicate matters to go out of the regular channel."

"But you will."

For a while he did not answer, merely staring at her.

"All right," he said, presuming that they understood each other, "I'll assign a man to the matter at once." He rang for an attendant. "Why did you come to me with this?" he continued. "It's unusual."

"Because I felt you would handle the matter satisfactorily."

"Then you don't have the confidence in Lyman Curtis that you have in me?"

"That isn't it," Marcia hastened to assure him. "I came to you because I don't want Mr. Curtis to know about it."

This pleased Minter.

"Oh, you want it handled—a—"

"Quietly," Marcia took up what he was stuttering over. A jaunty young fellow came into the room.

"See if you can find Lucien Stark," was Minter's request to him, "and ask him to come here."

The page was careful about getting the order right. "You want to see him here?"

"Yes."

He nodded and left.

"Now then," said Minter, again turning to Marcia, "I want to ask you a few questions." He wrote her name on a legal form. "Your age?" he asked.

"Is all that necessary?" she asked, studying the questionnaire.

"Well, not exactly."

Minter was able to complete from memory what he had started.

Just then Stark was announced. Because of his infallible methods, habitual violators of the law feared

Stark more than any other detective in the service. He was relentless when tracing criminals, not even hesitating to resort to violations himself when he felt the necessity of employing such means. Before entering the service he had several times escaped the toils of the law for such transgressions. Evidently, by assigning Stark to the case, Minter earnestly proposed to take Blake into custody.

"You wanted me, Mr. Minter?" asked the man.

"Yes, Stark," said his superior. "I understand you have finished with the Dolan matter?"

"I have."

His voice was so soft and pleasing that Marcia regarded him with apprehension. How was it possible for a man with his reputation to be so mild-mannered? Then she remembered that people with these characteristics are usually the most relentless in their dealings. She began pitying Blake, and a strange forgiving feeling came over her, making her want to withdraw the charges.

"This is Mrs. Blake," said Minter, looking across at Marcia. He handed Stark an outline of the complaint. "Here is what she wants you to do for her." The detective did not give her much consideration, except for a sharp glance as he took the paper. He spent a few moments going over the outline, then turned to Marcia and regarded her with amazement. Then he cast another swift glance at the paper.

He had long, slender fingers and he turned the paper with something akin to a feminine twist of his wrist. And he stood so lightly on his feet that it seemed he was trying to keep himself from sinking in quicksand. His manner made him repulsive to Marcia, but she excused him because it was only natural to expect a man of his remarkable acumen to conduct himself in a rather extraordinary manner; and, being a detective, she excused him for the somewhat embarrassing scrutiny to which he subjected her.

"I hope I can be of service to you, Mrs. Blake," he said at length. "I'll do my utmost."

"Thank you, Mr. Stark," she said simply.

In Stark's mind there was not the least doubt about being able to find Blake. Among his associates he was

known as the man who always got what he went after. The thing that puzzled him was why Marcia was soliciting his aid to trace a man who had run away from her with another woman. A woman as pretty as she would have no difficulty whatever finding a man who would appreciate her—even if he was a detective.

"As yet, I cannot say how soon I'll succeed," continued Stark. "But I'll locate him as quickly as I can."

"When you do," said Marcia, "don't be too severe with him."

Stark studied the complaint again, then Marcia. "I want to assure you that as far as possible your wish will be adhered to."

The detective asked her to sit down. They now went into details, many of which were wholly unnecessary. But here was a beautiful woman, at present unattached, and he decided to make the most of the situation.

* * * * *

As a soda clerk Blake was not a very great success. He had difficulty remembering how to prepare orders and many of the concoctions he served were rejected. Although business was falling off through his unsatisfactory service, he nevertheless felt the necessity of asking his employer for an increase in wages, as it had become sadly evident that it was impossible for three persons to subsist on the weekly pittance he was receiving. When he spoke to Dover about it, the proprietor saw an opportunity to rid himself of Blake without hurting him, for he liked the cumbersome individual, though he presumed a smaller man would more nearly look the part of a soda clerk, and could possibly get along on less formidable wages.

Dover had discovered that Blake knew more about chemicals than any prescription clerk he had ever employed, so he informed him that he had recommended him to Mathew LeGrand, president of the LeGrand Chemical Works, as a chemist. Dover telephoned to LeGrand, telling him that Carmody was ready to accept a position with him. He had asked the chemical manufacturer to stop at his store if he came downtown during the course of the day, but since LeGrand was at the time in urgent

need of a proficient chemist to do special work, he called on him not an hour later.

Blake was favorably impressed with LeGrand's proposition, so he accepted the new position that would give him something beyond the bare necessities of life. After that he and Phyllis lived in perfect contentment for several months, except that he was horrified every time he thought of the consequences if the federal agents should seize him.

But in spite of his fears, he established something in the way of permanency by purchasing a small cottage in an outlying district of the city. The house was old and of little value, but nevertheless it was something he could think of as *mine*; that was a very great satisfaction. He paid down only a small part of the purchase price and furnished it scantily with a cheap grade of furniture; but there they lived, happy because they had each other, even though there was a constant mortal fear lurking in the heart of each that their hiding place was liable to be discovered by those they knew were hunting them.

Then, when they were beginning to gain confidence that they had successfully eluded the federal agents, a terrible thing happened. Blake was working on some chemical equations LeGrand thought would net him a fortune if they could be solved, in which it was necessary to employ highly concentrated acids. He had always handled the strong acids with great caution, but one day he became careless for just an instant while replacing a rubber demijohn with concentrated hydrofluoric acid on a shelf above his head, when the disintegrated rubber crumbled in his hands and the escaping contents saturated his clothing, causing fearful burns over his entire body. Strangling and burning alive, Blake tore his clothing into shreds and dragged himself under a faucet of running water. The cold water gave him temporary relief, but he soon became conscious of a horrible numbness, as if he were undergoing a vital and physical separation, and he began struggling frantically to determine how seriously he was hurt. When corroded layers of skin and flesh came off his hands and lips and nostrils on the slightest touch, he knew what this meant; he would die or be forever an

abominable cripple—he decided he wanted to die. As he reached for a bottle of deadly poison with the intention of ending his life, the fumes that generated from the reaction of the acid on the body penetrated his lungs and caused a shortness of breath and spasmodic coughing, staying his hand. This condition increased in severity until he crumpled prostrate to the floor.

His assistant, absent at the time, returned a little later and found him in this collapsed state, and when the company physician obtained faint heart-sounds with a stethoscope, he was removed to a hospital.

“Joel Carmody dead!” gasped LeGrand when the accident was reported to him. “I can’t believe it! I was talking to him only a short time ago.”

LeGrand was so interested in Blake’s work and ability that he went to visit him several times daily in his laboratory. The shock of being robbed of success when it was almost within his grasp was severe. A second report reached him while he was on the way to Blake’s workroom, that Carmody was not dead and had been taken to a hospital; he hastened to the bedside. But he withdrew from the room in despair when he saw the pitiable hopelessness of the man on whom he had depended to develop his dream into a practicable miracle. When Blake was no longer of any value to him, like a worn out piece of machinery, he was ready to cast him aside.

Phyllis was notified and hurried to the hospital. Through the employment of heroic measures, Blake had been relieved of suffocation, and was gradually reviving when Phyllis arrived. His mentality dulled, his sight seriously blurred, his jangled perceptions mistook her for one of the federal agents from whom he had so long been hiding in constant terror of discovery. That terror was now magnified a hundredfold.

A nurse made a vain attempt to calm him. When she found it necessary to repress him forcefully to keep him in bed, he became so violent that it required several internes and nurses to place him in a straight-jacket. The resistance the straight-jacket offered seemed to be to his liking, and for hours he continued fighting against it with unyielding fury, until at last he succumbed to a sleep in-

duced by exhaustion and morphine. It was necessary to keep him in the restraint for many days, which was released only at times when he became rational or sank into a coma, to be quickly re-applied when he returned to frenzied delirium.

Then, after his life had been despaired of, he showed certain signs of improvement; although his turn for the better was not marked enough to be discernible to the eyes of the casual observer, his physician announced he was "holding his own." Despite the fact that the attending doctor was satisfied with the condition of his patient, for days Blake remained practically at a standstill. Then his improvement changed from a sluggish to such a rapid progress toward recovery that those in charge of the case marveled at his extraordinary recuperative power.

But the effect of the hydrofluoric acid, resulting in various desquamating and deep, open erosions, that filled with contracting scar-tissue as they healed, was binding him into a veritable knot. He was gradually becoming the miserable cripple his imagination had pictured as he was lying helpless on the laboratory floor.

When he was ready to leave the hospital he was unable to walk and only barely able to bring his hands to his mouth to feed himself. His face was contorted beyond recognition; what little hair was left on his head had changed in color. Not a recognizable feature remained. Also, through muscular contraction about his throat, the function of the vocal apparatus was impaired, and his voice was akin to the growl of a beast. Even when he slept, his eyes would not close; the contracted skin was constantly holding them wide open, giving them the appearance of being twice their usual size. In fact, his entire body was enveloped in such a mass of constricting bands of scar-tissue, which were daily drawing him more and more firmly together, that at last it seemed the final vital spark would be forced out of him.

While in the ambulance, on the way from the hospital to his house, Blake wondered with misgivings how Phyllis would receive him. He was indeed something loathesome for anyone to have as a companion, to say nothing of

having to be provided for. He wished he had succeeded in reaching the bottle of poison before his collapse.

In the meantime Phyllis had worries of her own. Her baby, a boy, whom she had named Donald, was born while Blake was in the hospital. He had not yet seen the child.

At last the ambulance came rolling easily up to the house; Phyllis trembled with anticipation. The attendants brought Blake in with great caution, lowered the stretcher in the middle of the room, lifted him into a chair Phyllis had prepared for him, and then departed as quietly as they had come. He looked about like a bird liberated from a long imprisonment in a cage, who, because of it, had forgotten how to use its wings for flight.

When his eyes encountered the little bed, he asked Phyllis to pull it over to him. Young Donald was at the time going through a series of juvenile calisthenics; the apparently well-timed attempt at rhythmical bodily contortions on the part of the youngster amused Blake. It was more than Phyllis could stand; she went to the bedroom to cry long and hard, and when she returned Blake was still pawing and cooing at the baby, who was evidently enjoying it.

"Did you cry?" he asked as best he could when he observed that her eyes were moist.

Phyllis nodded her head. "I couldn't help it."

"I don't want you to—"

He paused with a shudder, his blurry eyes full of intense appeal. Although his voice had failed him, he had spoken so plainly that Phyllis was startled. In her rejoicing over the possibility that he was regaining his speech, she waited for him to say more, but he remained silent, his face half buried in his helpless hands.

The baby, missing his attention, tried to attract him by fussing. Phyllis picked up the little fellow and laid her hand on Blake's shoulder with a sigh.

He looked up. "I don't blame you for feeling sorry for yourself!"

"I am not sorry for myself," she replied, when she realized that he misunderstood her grieving. "Donald, my heart aches for *you*. I didn't want to cry. I knew

it would make you feel bad . . . and I wanted to avoid *that*." She pressed the sputtering baby close to her. "Because we are one," she added.

"Phyllis, forgive me," he begged. "I'm desperate and miserable and disagreeable. . . . My appearance is enough for you to endure without having me act surly."

"There isn't anything that can keep me from loving you," she protested. "But the thought that I'll be unable to make you comfortable makes me uneasy."

"Now don't worry about that," he implored her. "I'm still able to get about. Will you bring me the stones in the top right-hand drawer of my writing-desk?"

Phyllis fetched a handful of semi-precious stones, some of them partially cut, regarding them thoughtfully as she dropped them into Blake's shriveled hand.

"What are you going to do with them?" she asked.

He looked up at her. "I'm going to cut them into cameos and intaglios."

Her eyes rested on his distorted hands. "How can you?"

"I'll show you presently if you'll help me over to that work-bench."

Phyllis regarded the outfit with which he proposed to eke out a livelihood. She had seen him working at it during spare moments while employed at the chemical factory, but it seemed impossible that he could accomplish anything in his present condition.

"You can't do it, Donald!"

"Help me get over there," he insisted.

He was heavy, but she succeeded in moving him to the work-table, which was nothing more than a small kitchen table, with a tool-rack on one end at the top, covered with unusual tools and instruments. Besides the rack filled with equipment, there was a vise and a small, intricate machine, equipped with an electric motor. He shifted himself into position at the table with difficulty, then maneuvered to adjust himself to some degree of comfort.

At last, fastening a stone in a tiny vise, he began the tedious cutting, only to discover before he had proceeded far that the shape of ordinary tools did not conform to

his malformed hands, and tired them. Nor did the height of his stool and the plane of the table correspond to the alignment of his body and arms to give the best results.

"Send for the locksmith down the street," he demanded of Phyllis rather brusquely. "And I want a carpenter, too."

Phyllis promptly obeyed him, glad to do anything that might relieve his misery and tense nerves, though it seemed ridiculous for a person in his physical condition to spend money on a notion. She sent her boy with a note to the locksmith, requesting him to return with the child if he could spare the time. Their nearest neighbor was a carpenter, and she left word with his wife for him to come over when he returned from work that evening.

The locksmith complied with her request and was tottering, old and feeble, at the boy's heels when he came back.

"Can you fashion the handles of these things to fit my hands?" Blake asked eagerly when the locksmith came in. "They are too large—my fingers don't go around them far enough for a good grip. I also want several of them bent."

The locksmith came over to him, a puzzled scowl on his face. He took a spectacle case from his pocket, then looked over the array of equipment and considered.

"Let me see," he said, picking up a chisel, "do I understand you right; you want smaller handles on these and you want some of them bent?"

Blake picked up two slender gouges and held them together to illustrate the angle he desired.

"That's what I want . . . bent like that."

"I see."

"Well, can you do it?"

"How about the temper?"

"You should know about that. . . . You remember telling me about making—"

"I know," interrupted the locksmith, as if suddenly recalling how to fly. "I know just what you want."

"Can you do it?"

"Yes, sure, I can."

"All right," said Blake nervously. "These are the ones

I want changed. I'll show you what I want done to each of them."

The locksmith took notes on a dirty pad with a stubby pencil, following Blake as he explained the alterations he desired.

* * * * *

LeGrand was an old-school business man, who conducted the business of his corporation in stern cold-blood. His affection for Blake, expressed in deeds as well as words, ceased when he was too badly crippled to carry on the experiments he had begun. Then, too, the chemist who followed Blake at the LeGrand works, through a lack of ability to go on with the work where Blake had left off, informed LeGrand that he was spending money on impossible equations. This angered LeGrand, and he accused Blake of being an impostor and a fraud, who had continued to work on a problem after he knew no results could be obtained. He even denounced the compensation law that provided for people like him.

"Starving is too good for them," he said.

With no prospect of assistance from LeGrand other than what the law compelled him to give, Phyllis came to the realization that Blake's determination to support them through his own efforts was not a mere idle fancy. What had at first seemed like a visionary folly now became a serious business. With this thought in mind, she earnestly set about to help him in his work.

She soon displayed such deftness in the art of lapidary that Blake had her do much of the work to which his withered hands were not adapted. Together they put in long hours at their tedious task, and their labors were not in vain as far as production was concerned.

But their product must be disposed of if their work was to be profitable. This had never entered Blake's dulled mind. Unknown to him, Phyllis brooded over the problem day and night for a week, at last deciding to secretly take a quantity of the finished stones to some of the stores downtown and try to dispose of them. The big stores were not inclined to deal with her, but finally she sold several of the stones to a dealer in antiquities, for an unusually large sum. After that, try as she would,

no more sales were made for many days. The only encouragement she received was the favorable opinion expressed regarding the amazingly fine quality of cutting by everybody who saw the gems; but the opinion seemed to be universal that this kind of adornment was out of vogue just now.

"Beautiful women have been in vogue since man came into being," thought Phyllis. "And beautiful things are never out of fashion with women," she thought further. She looked at the array of glittering stones. "And these are beautiful. I'll *make* people like them. I'll *make* them want them. . . . They were popular once and I'll make them popular again."

Filled with this determination to dispose of more stones, she began a systematic solicitation of the men and women she presumed would be interested in her wares. The experience she gained in this way offset the disappointments she naturally met with. Although only a few of those she approached bought, she very often obtained information that led to other prospective buyers.

It was not long now until the volume of her sales became very satisfactory, which lightened their hearts though their labors were increased, for they soon became aware that such a demand had been created for cameos and intaglios that their combined efforts could not produce enough gems to supply the demand, and they worked far into the nights to enhance their profits.

* * * * *

In the meantime Lucien Stark had not been successful in trailing Blake—at least that was what he reported to Marcia, though at the time of his last communication with her, he was in the city where Blake was living, ready to arrest him any moment he desired to do so. Blake's evasiveness aroused Marcia's ire. Her anger made her more determined than ever to find him. Her chagrin would not let her rest. In the beginning she had requested Stark to be mild with him, but now she was urging the detective to use every means at his disposal to find him and forget about being lenient if he was successful. For fear that Stark might relinquish his assign-

ment, she was sending him large sums of money to make it worth his while to continue with the case.

But the Blake interests in Waverly were beginning to suffer severely from lack of proper management, causing Marcia's funds to run low, making it impossible for her to send Stark any more money. Marcia informed him about this in a rather pitiful letter, and he immediately reported to her that he had located Blake. How he had accomplished this after so many months of futile searching was a mystery—but everything he did was mysterious.

Stark also sent a report to Minter, notifying him of his success, but Minter was ill when the communication arrived and Curtis was relieving him. It was the first intimation Curtis had had that Blake was a hunted man. A dreadful feeling of responsibility seized him. This was his opportunity to show Blake that he earnestly meant to repay him for his benevolence toward Phyllis, so he telegraphed to Stark to defer Blake's arrest until he arrived. This Stark did, waiting for Curtis with some impatience. Since there was no more money forthcoming he was inclined to conclude the matter quickly, but he respected the order from his superior.

Stark was at the depot when Curtis came to town, having met all the trains during the last twenty-four hours. They had a brief conference in the train-shed before going uptown. Stark scoffed at Curtis' suggestion to send another report to Washington, stating his inability to locate Blake.

"Lucien Stark never fails to land his man!" he said boastfully. "Blake is mine this time."

"You would be doing me a personal favor."

"I'd be only too glad to grant you any request in the world but this one."

"What's the reason for your obstinacy?"

"Just this," said the detective, "an unbroken string of successes extending over a period of ten years."

"Is that all?"

"That's sufficient reason for me!"

And Curtis knew it was for a man like Stark.

"Then do me the favor of putting off arresting him until tomorrow," he urged.

"Why, of course," he assented. "I'll wait a week or more . . . if that'll help you any. But, my dear Curtis, if you think you can do any good by warning Blake you're mistaken. Remember, I found him here and I'll find him again if he does get away. . . . However, I doubt that he could leave this city without my knowledge."

Curtis pondered while Stark continued to relate all he knew about the man he referred to as a fugitive, deliberately, as if challenging him to arrange an escape, telling how to reach the place where Blake was living.

"You'll not arrest him until tomorrow?"

"I've given you my word that I won't."

Curtis saw the futility of attempting to smuggle Blake out of the city with Stark free to watch him. He must work hard and fast if he was to save his friend. He spent the rest of the day at his hotel, preferring to be alone while trying to devise some scheme to detain Stark long enough to give Blake an opportunity to cover his tracks effectively after leaving the city. This, of course, was no easy matter with Blake in his physical condition. At length the name Rodwell came to his mind. Although the man's name might be anything but that, it was as such that it appeared on the records in Minter's office.

Rodwell was at the head of an opium ring that operated over a wide territory, with headquarters in that city. From the records it was manifest that these two—Stark and Rodwell—had been waging a mortal battle for a long time; one was constantly at the throat of the other. Before leaving to consult with Stark, Curtis had obtained this information by going over some of the reports Stark had made to his superiors during his ten years in the service.

Although Curtis had no intention of using Rodwell in aiding Blake to escape when he read Stark's account of him, it was nevertheless so interesting that he had read all of it, and fortunately remembered most of the details. Several times Rodwell had evaded Stark's carefully woven web by only the narrowest margin—just the smallest link of evidence was lacking to convict him. A year ago two of his lieutenants were killed by federal agents when they

attempted to escape after being caught perpetrating crimes; but Rodwell's perspicacity was such that it kept him from falling into a trap. However, Stark did not consider his hitherto unsuccessful attempts to apprehend Rodwell as failures—it was merely an unfinished job.

On the other hand, Rodwell was trying unceasingly to put Stark out of the way. Twice, in rapid succession, Stark had eluded Rodwell and his associates only by the grace of chance. Because of the ill feeling that existed between these two men, Curtis was still hopeful of saving Blake.

That evening Curtis went to see Rodwell, whom he found after doing a little detective work on his own account. Of course, if he had not remembered the details in Stark's account so well, he would have experienced considerable difficulty locating him. A man answering Rodwell's description was seated at a table listening to a stalwart confederate when Curtis came in unannounced.

"What's your business here?" one of the men demanded when Curtis approached.

Curtis was almost certain that the man who had spoken to him was Rodwell.

"I'm looking for Mr. Rodwell," said Curtis.

"You're speaking to him."

"I'm Lyman Curtis, and I'd like to talk with you alone."

The two men arose, Rodwell standing still while the others withdrew toward the door.

Rodwell began bluntly. "I don't believe you."

"How do you want me to prove my identity?"

"We'll do that."

"Very well. . . . Go ahead."

"Frisk him," Rodwell ordered the men at the door. "We'll see if he's telling the truth."

"I'm from the department of justice," Curtis hastened to explain, thinking it was best to do this because of certain papers he had in his pockets. "But my business with you has nothing to do with that. It's a personal matter."

"If you're Curtis," Rodwell assured him, "then I know where you are from. But I don't believe you are Curtis."

The man searched for weapons.

"I'm unarmed," Curtis asserted.

"He hasn't a gun."

"Go on and frisk him," Rodwell repeated his orders. "Make a thorough job of it. What are those papers I see in his pocket?"

A careful search revealed nothing beyond what is common to the pockets of most men. The only thing Rodwell seemed interested in was the bundle of papers he had asked about; after looking these over at some length he returned them to Curtis.

"Now then, what is your business with me?" demanded Rodwell when his confederate had left the room on his orders. "Be quick about it."

"Stark is in the city."

"Well?" said Rodwell, a look of suspicion crossing his face.

"I thought it might interest you to know it."

"I knew he was in town," Rodwell lied.

Had Curtis believed him, it would have seemed his plans had gone amiss. "His presence in the city has been kept a secret."

"Yes, I know," said Rodwell, coolly. "But finding out secrets is part of my business."

"He's stopping at the Radmore."

Rodwell was beginning to show anxiety. "So I was told."

"I'd give quite a little if I could have him detained until I can get a friend out of the city whom he is about to arrest."

Rodwell was uneasy and puzzled. Then Curtis explained the situation to him in detail. And when they parted it was evident from their attitude toward each other that they had agreed on something important.

* * * * *

The following morning the newspapers contained bold headlines regarding the mysterious murder of Lucien Stark, a federal agent, in his hotel room.

"They went further than I thought they would," said Curtis to himself. "I didn't think they would kill him."

He went immediately to see Blake. It was a long ride on the trolley. Then, arriving at the place, there was

the wait in a little store across the street, summoning courage to carry out his mission. And when at last he saw Phyllis leaving, he hastened to the little house. His own boy answered the knock on the door.

"Mamma isn't home," he said as soon as the door opened. "She's away selling jewelry."

Curtis winced but he caught himself when Blake shifted around for a look at the caller. To one who knew Blake as well as Curtis did there remained a bare resemblance of the doctor's former features, but his body seemed to have shrunk to almost half its former size. Curtis approached him slowly, a sense of horror making him uncertain and hesitant, though it seemed good to be so near the man he had come to help. Blake extended his hand, much with the limited motion of a fin; the great arms that Curtis had seen entwined about three athletic young fellows in a friendly scuffle at the Waverly drug-store one evening, tossing them in a heap on the floor like so many faggots, were so distorted that they looked unhuman.

"My God!" he exclaimed when he had satisfied himself that it was really Blake and that he was a helpless invalid. "How did this happen?"

"I suppose it's the result of the way I've lived—the sequence of events," said Blake resignedly. "Blame whom you wish."

"It was dreadful enough to hear that you and Marcia had separated—but this! . . . This is too terrible! I knew you'd been hurt, but I didn't think you were in a condition like this."

"Blame whom you like," repeated Blake.

"I thought you and Marcia were as happy as any couple in all the world could possibly be."

"We were, but we didn't know it," said Blake, resuming his work on a stone, as if not a minute of his ebbing life must be wasted. "We were in paradise for a while, but I guess we went beyond it."

It was plain to see that a marked change had taken place in the doctor aside from the physical injuries he had sustained. He was no longer inclined to reject proffered sympathy; the attitude that the world owed him

more than it could give had left him. Perhaps this was not alone the result of bodily agony, but through the realization that even the most powerful man is a mere child in the hands of fate. He had his death warrant written legibly upon his face. His flesh, where it was not eroded by the acid, had fallen away, and he was markedly bald and much older than his years.

A baby began crying in another room. The little boy who had met Curtis at the door went into the room and returned in a few moments, lugging an infant, the bulky weight almost more than he could handle. He was talking in an oddly maternal way to his charge, promising wonderful things. Then, without hesitation, he began putting a fresh change of clothes on the baby.

"Our children," said Blake, answering Curtis' questioning gaze.

"*Our* children?"

"Yes. . . . Yours and mine."

Curtis seemed to understand.

"Don, I had to see you, and when I saw Phyllis leaving, I hurried over. I knew I could face you—but never her again. I must go before she comes back."

Blake continued to busy himself with his work. "Don't you think this is a poor place to come to, feeling the way you do? She may return any moment."

"I had to come . . . to warn you that you must leave this city. It's not safe for you here. I'll help you get away. A federal agent trailed you and was about to arrest you when he was murdered. Someone went to his room in the hotel last night and killed him. But his death means only a short respite for you. They'll eventually get you if you remain here."

Blake was unmoved, apparently unconcerned over what Curtis had told him.

"Thank you for your willingness to help me," he said, allowing his attention to stray for only an instant from the stone he was cutting. "I have nothing to fear any more. I am not long for this world."

Blake was right when he said he had nothing to fear. His physical condition was such that torture of any kind could not be other than short lived. It was unlikely

that he should fear death; still it seemed that something was having an evil mental effect on him. Perhaps it was the consequent suffering his death would cause his dependents that he had in mind.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes," said the other, raising his head and laying down his work. "I want you to go to Waverly and see what you can save from the wreck. I understand everything has gone to pieces. Heavens knows they will need it here—and Marcia, too." Tears began trickling down his scarred face. "Will you do that?"

"I'm glad you have a favor to ask of me. I'll leave tonight."

"That's fine of you. You've always been fine—and I've always liked you."

At this moment Curtis saw Phyllis alighting from a trolley car only a short distance away.

"There is Phyllis," he said nervously. "She must not find me here. Where can I go?"

"Hide in that closet," Blake suggested. "I'll send her on some kind of an errand when she comes in. That'll give you a chance to get away."

Curtis stepped into a cubby-hole that was hung across with a lounge cover for a curtain. Phyllis came in a moment later; she hurried toward Blake, caressed him tenderly.

"I had wonderful luck today, Donald," she said. "I sold all the stones I had with me at one place. The demand for them is terrific. That is why I am back early." She opened her pocketbook. "Look at all this money," she continued, flourishing a handful of paper. "We're really rich. Can you think of anything good you want to eat?"

Blake thought hard and fast. The butcher shop was two blocks away.

He said, "I've been thinking of sweetbreads—I'd like some."

* * * * *

Two days later Curtis arrived in Waverly on the late night train. He climbed into the Dumont motor bus, where a single fellow-passenger, who had been sleeping

sonorously on the train, roused himself from drowsiness by yawning repeatedly.

At the hotel he found Coats, Blake's former caretaker, in the capacity of night clerk. Curtis grasped his hand and greeted him jovially, but the old clerk appeared to be mourning some great loss, saying very little and refusing to smile at all. When he did talk it was evident that he was not his former self, his discourse being limited strictly to the necessary and commonest words. There remained none of his former metaphoric redundancy. He showed no sign of being either delighted or disappointed over seeing Curtis, talking and stirring about as if his vitality had been completely depleted.

"Where is Mrs. Blake?" Curtis finally asked.

This seemed to rouse him.

"I hope you haven't come to continue persecuting that poor woman!" he said vehemently.

"I wouldn't be guilty of anything like that."

"I hope not! But you damned politicians are the cause of her predicament!"

"Politicians?"

"You bet! Politics ruined her life. It was the cause of the only difficulty that ever came between her and myself."

Curtis wondered how much truth there was in Coats' accusation. He admired the old man for his loyalty to his former mistress.

"Where is she?" he asked again. "What is she doing?"

"She is stopping here," replied Coats, walking to and fro, "doing nothing but worrying herself to death!"

"She is staying here?"

Coats suddenly stopped. "You knew the Blakes lost everything they ever owned?"

"No. . . . I didn't."

"Well, Blake is gone and she's destitute."

Curtis turned away. So he was being blamed, at least partly, for her sad predicament. Were the people justified in thinking him guilty of a thing like that? Although he believed himself altogether blameless, it was very unpleasant to have the unsavory reputation of having had a hand in the disruption of the Blake home.

"Show me to my room," he said, no longer able to meet Coats' accusing gaze.

Although it was late in the night, Curtis had no thought of sleep. He smoked numberless cigarettes, which seemed to soothe his nerves; when smoking no longer had a sedative effect on him, he tried to while away the time reading, but he could not find a subject sufficiently interesting to absorb him. Putting the paper aside, he fell into silent meditation. If he could talk to Marcia he would feel better, even if she believed him culpable with respect to her situation, as Coats and probably a thousand others did. Then, at least, he could tell her how innocently guilty and sorry he was.

Still pondering, he was aroused by a peculiar creaking, screeching noise not far away, as if a heavy vehicle were being drawn through deep snow on a frosty night. But it was not cold and there was no snow on the ground. The unusual sound grew to a terrific roar, and Curtis was almost positive he could smell smoke. A moment later a gray film began to permeate the walls of his room. He went to the door, and, opening it, long tongues of flames, that leaped at him from everywhere, smote him in the face. Shrieks of distress could be heard. Someone rushed past him in a mad frenzy, hesitated an instant, then disappeared into the smoke and roaring flames. There was a prolonged, horrible, gasping outcry, then quiet.

Even while Curtis stood in the door he could see the fury of the fire increase with bewildering rapidity, the brick-veneered frame structure burning like tinder. Almost before he could close the door the flames were everywhere breaking into his room; he must not waste a moment if he was to save himself. So, without stopping to consider, he rushed across to a window and leaped out of it headlong. His room was on the third floor and his heedless plunge was partially broken by telephone wires, undoubtedly saving his life. When he regained his feet he reeled about until an officer came along and pushed him behind a rope the firemen had drawn up. There was nothing to do but stand helplessly and watch the structure burn.

The efforts of the firemen seemed to be of no avail against the ravages of the fire. The streams of water that were playing on it appeared to give it zest. It was the second great fire Waverly had had within a comparatively short time and the firemen, working with the confidence of experience, fought heroically. A fireman came down the ladder with a body wrapped in a blanket. Feminine footwear indicated it was a woman. Instantly the thought came to Curtis that this might be Marcia, for a survey of the crowd had failed to reveal her. He fought his way through the throng and followed the fireman until he placed the prostrate figure on the turf of the courthouse lawn.

"Oh!" he groaned, when the blistered face was uncovered. "Oh! Oh! Marcia!"

She opened her eyes, recognizing him with difficulty. "Why are you here, Lyman?" she whispered.

"Blake sent me. . . . He thought of you."

"Then you saw him?"

"Yes."

"How is he?"

"Very bad. . . . He met with a serious accident. It is killing him."

"Will you see him again?"

"Yes."

"Tell him—" She stopped for breath. "T-t-ell him that I have forgiven him."

Her eyes closed slowly. Her body relaxed. She was dead.

* * * * *

After Marcia's funeral, that had upset Curtis more than any he had ever attended, he hastened to deliver her message to Blake. He again went to the little store across the street from the house to wait until Phyllis left the house, but hour after hour passed and not a living thing stirred about the place. At last he concluded to find out what was amiss. This time his knock on the door was answered by Phyllis.

"Come in," she said, apparently not in the least surprised to see him. "I have something to tell you."

Curtis obeyed her reluctantly. He saw Blake's work-table bereft of its paraphernalia; the household effects

were partly packed, and there was a sad expression on Phyllis' face.

"Where is Blake?" he asked, when he did not see the doctor anywhere about. "Where is he?"

"He is dead," she faltered, her eyes welling with tears. "We buried him yesterday."

"Marcia is dead, too," he said. "She died in a hotel fire."

Neither could say any more, and for a long time they remained silent.

"If it wasn't for the babies," she said at last, "I'd want to die, too."

"Don't, Phyllis," he implored her. "My indebtedness to you is greater than I can ever repay, but that will not keep me from trying to put myself right with you as much as I can. . . . If you'll let me. You are a truly wonderful woman. I realized that when I was here a few days ago. You didn't know."

"Donald told me about it."

"He did!"

"It was the last thing he said to me. He wanted me to know how good you were to him, and he made me promise to thank you for him."

"The poor fellow," he said miserably. "I didn't think he would go so soon."

"I wish you could have been here."

"It was impossible for me to be in two places at the same time," he explained. "I'm sorry."

"But you hid deliberately when you were here. I was disappointed in the way you avoided me!"

"Will you marry me, Phyllis?" he said bluntly. "You will when you realize how much I love you. Then we'll always be together."

It was needless for her to consider the situation further. She had thought it over so many times in the past. Then, too, she had loved Curtis all these years, only her stubbornness prohibiting an expression of her love.

He took her gently in his arms. "We'll go away, Phyllis—to London, where I have accepted a position with a publishing house. I sent my resignation to Washington yesterday. . . . Will you come . . . as my wife?"

Her head was resting on his shoulder when she nodded.

248 10 1525

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00021689580

